



# THE TECHNIQUE OF THE PHOTOPLAY

EPES WINTHROP SARGENT



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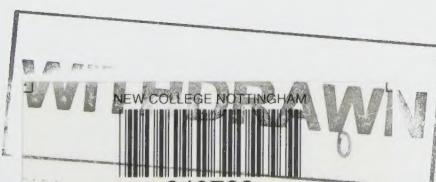
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# The Technique Of The Photoplay

Epes Winthrop Sargent



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*The*  
**TECHNIQUE**  
OF THE  
**PHOTOPLAY**

SECOND EDITION

BY  
EPES WINTHROP SARGENT

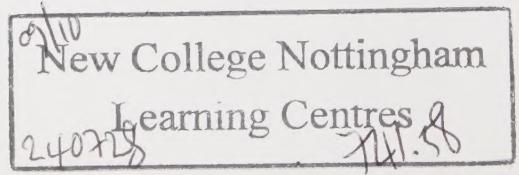
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# Contents

- I. THE PHOToplay.....  
*Told in action instead of words—a distinct literary form--requisites of a writer—not all may achieve success.*
  - II. A VISIT TO A THEATER.....  
*Technical terms—the value of a title—the reel—stage terms—leader—inserts—visions—dissolves—cut-backs—matches—masks—night scenes.*
  - III. PRODUCING THE PHOToplay.....  
*Going the rounds—the rejection slip—causes for rejections—giving plenty of time—reconstruction—reproduction.*
  - IV. TOOLS OF THE TRADE.....  
*What is required—the proper paper—necessity for type-writing—envelopes—manuscript record—mailing the script—things to be avoided.*
  - V. THE FORM OF THE PHOToplay.....  
*The three divisions of the photoplay—the synopsis—the cast—the action—the need for a brief synopsis—synopses only—the scene plot.*
  - VI. THE PLOT OF ACTION.....  
*Necessity for orderly arrangement—impossible to go back—introducing and identifying the characters—the start and finish important.*
  - VII. LEADERS AND INSERTED MATTER.....  
*Importance of careful work—Leaders vs. Letters—telegrams, newspaper clippings—pictorial inserts—need for variety—the “leaderless” script.*
  - VIII. A STUDY OF THE SYNOPSIS .....
- The vital importance of the synopsis—the great appeal to the editor—the opportunity for literary style—how to condense and retain the story.*

- IX. CONDENSING THE SCRIPT.....  
*Keeping the action short—aim to tell much in few words—the reason for terseness—needless explanation—by-play and the real action.*
- X. PLOT FORMATION .....
- Incident is not plot—the story must have an object—the happy ending—only one leading character—the need for struggle—sources of plots.*
- XI. EVOLVING A PLOT.....  
*Deriving plots from nothing—from the title—from a start—from a climax—knowledge of the subject necessary.*
- XII. DEVELOPING THE PLOT.....  
*Possibilities of the plot—getting the plot on paper—the picture eye—do not be afraid to change—watch for situations—the increasing interest.*
- XIII. PUTTING IN THE PUNCH.....  
*What the punch is—the three sorts of dramatic punch—raising the commonplace to the dramatic—relation of punch to plot—the comedy punch.*
- XIV. THE CUT-BACK.....  
*Value of the cut-back—used to stop gaps and cover breaks—used to maintain suspense—how to handle—the dramatic cut-back—the comedy cut-back.*
- XV. VALUES AND EMPHASIS.....  
*The emphasis of action—of situation—of acting—through busts—emphasizing leaders in action—relative values of the players—placing scenes.*
- XVI. THE DRAMATIC STORY.....  
*Easier than comedy to most persons—crime and violence not in themselves dramatic—death not always dramatic—heart interest makes the strongest appeal—things to avoid.*
- XVII. THE COMEDY STORY.....  
*Difficult to write—idea and action must both be humorous—developing the idea in comedy action—avoid ridicule—personal afflictions not comedy material.*
- XVIII. THE TRICK PICTURE.....  
*Limited demand for the trick picture story—basis of trick work—stop camera—back turning—accelerated speed—double exposure—double printing.*

- XIX. THE MULTIPLE-REEL.....  
*The series story—the preparation of the script—how to break into parts—numbering the scenes—the synopsis.*
- XX. ADAPTATIONS .....
- Adaptations not desired—studio staff is better equipped to write these scripts through their knowledge of just what is required—preparing for adaptation.*
- XXI. THE TALKING PICTURES.....  
*How they are made—the limitations—timing the picture—range of subjects—their future.*
- XXII. COPYRIGHT AND THE COPYRIGHT STORY.....  
*What copyright is—what protection afforded—manuscript not copyrightable—what may and may not be taken from the copyrighted story.*
- XXIII. CENSORSHIP OF FILMS.....  
*The National Board of Censorship—police censorships—what is forbidden, and why—when crime is permissible.*
- XXIV. THE STOLEN STORY.....  
*Do Editors steal stories? A frank discussion of a question you are bound to ask—how duplications occur.*
- XXV. YOU AND THE EDITOR.....  
*A few hints on how to sell to advantage—your attitude toward the editor—the slight value of personal pull—querying manuscript—lost scripts.*
- XXVI. SELF CRITICISM.....  
*Difficulties of self-criticism—lack of proper perspective—interest in the subject—value of delayed judgment.*
- XXVII. HOW TO STUDY.....  
*The value of practise—the need for study—the theater as a schoolroom—self criticism—the value of advice.*
- XXVIII. THE UNASKED QUESTION.....  
*Things you will want to know explained in detail.*
- XXIX. TECHNICAL TERMS.....  
*Terminology of the studio—definitions of studio phrases—new meanings given words in common use.*
- XXX. COMPLETE ACTION .....

## INTRODUCTION TO SECOND EDITION

It is less than eighteen months since the first edition was placed in the market, following serial publication in the columns of THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD, but those eighteen months have been marked by great changes in photoplay needs and construction. Then the cut-back was merely a device for avoiding the showing of unpleasant or prohibited action; now it figures importantly in the development of the story. The "punch," too, was then a thing unnamed, though the punch has always been the requisite of the real story. The past year has also seen the acceptance of the multiple-reel as a regular release instead of an occasional novelty.

These and minor changes have rendered it expedient to issue a completely new volume under the old title. With the exceptions noted above there is little herein contained that may not be found in the first edition, but all matters are treated in greater detail and an effort has been made to teach rather than to set forth the rules, and leave the writer to make his own application of the same. Instead of one there are four complete sample manuscripts, for two of which we are indebted to the Lubin Manufacturing Company and to Lawrence S. McCloskey, their Editor-author, and in addition there are many examples in explanation of certain developments.

An effort has been made to set forth clearly all of the matters treated, but this information will be useless to he who merely reads and does not study this little volume. It is not a magic wand to be waved over the typewritten page. It is a text book for the earnest student who seeks to make progress, and to all earnest students, who realize that the Photoplay is by no means the least of the branches of literary work, this volume is dedicated in the hope that they will find as much pleasure in the study of its pages as has the writer in preparing the work.

NEW YORK, June, 1913.

EPES WINTHROP SARGENT.

# Technique of the Photoplay

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PHOTOPLAY

**Told in action instead of words—a distinct literary form—  
requisites of a writer—not all may achieve success.**

Although not technically correct, the simplest and most understandable definition of the photoplay is that it is a story told in pictured action instead of being described in words.

A series of incidents, closely connected, leading from a start to a definite ending, is a story when told in words. If it is told in dialogue form with appropriate action and gesture, it becomes a play. Done in action and gesture, but without words, it is a pantomime, but pantomime as it is understood on the stage, is not a photoplay. The pantomime of the stage employs a "language" of its own. Certain gestures mean certain things, and pantomime is told in a sort of sign language, not understood by many in America, but intelligible to most European theater-goers. Photoplay has no arbitrary gestures.

The photoplayer who asks for food, stretches his hand toward the spread table and looks more or less appealing, according to the circumstances in which he finds himself. The pantomimist would open his mouth and point down his throat with the first and second fingers of his hand. If it were drink that he desired, he would use the thumb, extending from his clenched fist, instead of his fingers.

In the early days, copying the work of the French producers, this elementary language was employed in part in the making of the motion picture plays of that period, but as the art advanced, the stilted, arbitrary and unconvincing "language" of pantomime was replaced by natural gestures and actions.

Photoplay, in a word, is not an adaptation of another branch of literary work, but is possessed of a technique all its own. There are, of course, the broad basic rules of literary construction and dramatic development, applicable to all forms of literature, whether written or verbally expressed, but in the past few years the art of writing photoplays has become possessed of a technique that is applicable only to the writing of picture plays and to no other form.

The photoplay itself is the newest of the literary arts. Pictures of motion projected on the screen became a commercial proposition only in 1895. Even then it was crude and undeveloped; the forty and fifty foot comedies bearing but slight resemblance to the multiple-reel stories of to-day. Many of the machines of that time could not take more than fifty feet of film at one time, and it was not possible to give more than the hint of a story in the fifty to sixty seconds the picture ran.

As the interest in these short, sketchy subjects waned, the makers of projectors increased the capacity of their machines. One, two and three hundred feet could be taken at one time and this capacity was increased until there are now machines that can project three thousand feet of film without reloading and the ultimate capacity of the machine is merely a matter of the size of the magazine and the mechanical difficulties of handling a reel weighing more than twenty pounds.

As the films grew in length, longer stories were produced and these more ambitious efforts called for the production of the picture under more careful management. In place of the man who had dropped into the business, regular stage managers were employed, recruited mostly from the stock and repertoire companies. For a time they wrote all their own plays; rehashes of the standard drama, adaptations from non-copyright books or the products of their own imagination.

One of the Edison producers conceived the idea of making a western play with a large production and hired a small branch of a railroad for a Sunday. He told the players engaged that they could bring their friends, if they desired, and they could see how pictures were made if they would "go in" a couple of scenes.

He had not counted on such a host as showed up at the station at train time, but they all went along and "The Great Train Robbery" was made with the largest company of people that to that time had ever been employed in a dramatic picture play.

This production marked the turning point of the photoplay. It was shown that the pictures were not yet dead, for one New York vaudeville theater restored the pictures to their old "headline" position, making the "Train Robbery" the featured attraction.

The change brought a demand for stronger stories. It was seen that the studio force could not produce each week a sufficiently strong story, and outside writers were invited to contribute suggestions, for which they were paid from five to fifteen dollars. These mere synopses were developed in the studio into scripts, since few of the writers possessed the knowledge of picture-making requisite to enable them to develop the script.

As the submission of manuscripts to the studios increased and it became apparent that the flood had just commenced, someone familiar with current and standard literature was employed to detect the impostor who sought to sell stories written by others, to read the submissions and select the good from the bad and in general to place his literary intelligence at the disposal of the other studio workers. Since their duties were in part editorial, and for want of a better title, they were known as Editors.

The editors quickly saw that they could be better served if the writers were instructed in the details of picture making. They could not only plan their plots better, but suggest the layout of the scenes. The plot alone was seldom offered in such shape that the scenes were suggested and in order to plan the scenes intelligently, some knowledge of the methods of picture making and some hint as to exact form were needed.

Instruction sheets, generally known as Form Sheets, were supplied without charge to all who asked, but this practise has been abandoned and the desire of the manufacturer is now to check in so far as possible the vast number of faulty scripts that pour into the studio in every mail. Most of the correspondence school courses are copied from or at least based on these old form sheets, but the work has been done by men not fitted by their own knowledge to combine the various sheets.

These schools, through their methods of advertising, have done the business real harm in that the statements made to the effect that no skill or ability is needed to write plays has encouraged literally thousands of ignorant and incompetent persons to submit their scripts and has given others, for whom there might have been hope, the fatal belief that writing photoplays is a simple matter requiring no special qualification or preparation.

This is a very grave error. There was a time when the idea, no matter how crudely presented, was eagerly sought, but that order has changed. The successful writer of the moment is as well equipped technically as the novelist or the dramatist. He writes in strict accordance with the rules of construction and he observes with care the hundred and one details that go to make the perfect script.

It is entirely true that the gift of fluent literary expression is not required, and in this photoplay opens a field to many whose ideas are good, but who are unable to write flowing English, but there is demanded instead the knack, inherent or acquired, of thinking and writing in action, of planning effective situations instead of rounded sentences, of devising dramatic moments and periods of suspense instead of writing glowing narrative and brilliant description.

The first requisite in writing photoplay is imagination. Without this trait none may hope to succeed. The trained fiction writer can take an old plot and with graceful style and vivid word painting cause it to appear to be completely new, but in photoplay the *plot* is the foundation of success. Style cannot disguise the age of the idea, there must be some freshness to the plot; some original twist or completely new development that renders the work acceptable. In this respect the photoplay writer is at a disadvantage beside the creator of fiction or even the producer of dramatic plays.

Imagination, prolific and creative, is the first demand, but this must be supplemented by an ability to weigh the values of a situation. The author of photoplays must be able to gauge his story so nicely that the interest of the spectator is held in growing tensity until the climax breaks. What the fiction writer must do in words, the photoplay writer must do with *business and situation*.

In the years of development between 1909 and 1913, upward of ten thousand persons have sought to win success as photoplay writers. This is a conservative estimate. Some Editors place the figures at nearer 50,000. Some write one or two plays and give up in disgust when these do not sell. Others are more persistent, but of all who have made the venture there are not more than fifty persons outside the studios, who look to photoplay writing for their support or who are competent to gain a decent income from the writing of plays alone.

The payment for photoplays is increasing steadily, but with it comes a demand for a grade of work commensurate with the higher payment. In magazine work the man who gets five cents a word is expected to write a vastly better story than the man who is paid but half a cent. It is the same in photoplay.

The writing of photoplays, then, is no short cut on the road to success, nor is it a pastime lightly to be taken up when the spirit moves. It is not possible to read any book or course and at once write scripts that will sell. Success is to be gained, save in exceptional instances, only through close study, hard work and long practise. It is not possible to sell many if any scripts the first year, but photoplay writing is a pleasant avocation, if not a profitable vocation, and careful study and hard work may lead to studio connections and good remuneration. The amateur of yesterday is the expert of today and without exception they are the ones who were willing to study and work hard.

## CHAPTER II.

## A VISIT TO A THEATER

Technical terms—the value of a title—the reel—stage terms—leader—inserts—visions—dissolves—cut-backs—matches—masks—night scenes.

Before we apply ourselves closely to the study of technique, let us first visit some photoplay theater and watch a subject run. It will help us to familiarize ourselves with some of the terms and give us an idea of the films. The photoplay theater is the real schoolroom of the man or woman who would write picture plays if only the visit is made with seeing eyes and not solely for the purpose of amusement. There is no more valuable instruction to be had, for here we can see the successes and failures and can study out the causes of those triumphs or defeats.

Before we go inside let's look at the lobby for a moment and study the posters. We have come with the fixed intention of entering. The poster display can neither attract us nor send us on our way, but the theater is on a busy thoroughfare and hundreds pass with a glance at the pictures. Some are attracted by the title or the picture and stop to look, some of these pass on, others enter the theater.

Some of the titles do not attract us. There is one that is seven words long. If we were hurrying past, the quick glance could never take in that title, and no matter how attractively it may be worded, we would not be induced to enter. Nor is it merely long and cumbersome. It takes up more than a third of the space that in other posters is given to the picture of some catchy scene from the play. There's another on the other side of the ticket box. The letters are twice the size of the other and yet they take up only about a sixth of the poster space. Just two words—Bessie Did—but the picture is that of a rather attractive looking girl, and we are glad that we are going inside that we may learn what it was she did.

We've learned one thing already and we've not even bought a ticket. We have found that a title should be short, so as to be quickly read, and attractive so as to pique the curiosity and make the person reading the title want to see the picture. If we saw what it was that Bessie did from the picture on the poster, we

know that we should not be so eager when we got inside, so we have also learned that the title must tell something about the picture, but not tell so much that we know all about the picture before we see it on the screen.

One poster announces that the story is in three parts and another says "Big six-reel show today."

The *reel* is the spool on which the film is wound; a cylinder of wood as wide as the film and about two inches through. On each side is a metal disc, about ten inches in diameter, to hold the film in place. That's one sort of reel, but a reel is also a rough standard of measurement. It is about a thousand feet of film, seldom less than 950 and never less than 850. If a manufacturer *releases* or puts on the market four reels a week, it means that on four set days he publishes about a thousand feet of film. The *exchanges* which hire the reels to the theaters, have standing orders for certain release days. They know they will get about one thousand feet of film instead of getting 500 this Friday and 1,800 feet next Friday, so the reel is handy for them. On the other hand they contract with the theater to rent it so many reels a day, and the manager knows that if he gets three reels his performance will run about an hour, since it takes from fifteen to eighteen minutes to run one thousand feet of film at proper speed. The reel is a handy measure for him, because he knows that three reels means about three thousand feet.

That a subject is in three *parts* means that it is in three *reels* or that it runs about three thousand feet or one hour. *Part* sounds better than *reel* and is better understood, so *part* is used in the case of a story that runs more than one reel.

A *split reel* means that the thousand feet has been divided or split up between two or more subjects, and we speak of *split reel* or *half reel* comedies or dramas to indicate some play that does not run the full thousand feet.

Perhaps a part of the split reel may be given to an *educational* subject. That is a general term for almost anything that is not a play. It may be a picture of the "Bay of Naples" or an X-Ray picture of the human stomach; it may be made in China or Chicago or right outside the theater door. There was a time when the educational was merely used to fill out the reel with, but now they have a value of their own. The educational and the *animated weekly* that is merely a newspaper in motion pictures, are things with which we have no present concern. The film makers have special photographers who travel about getting these, and we cannot sell tips on the news yet, though this may come in time.

Passing the door we'll peep into the projection room and look at the *projection machine*. This is nothing more than a magic lantern with a mechanism for passing the film in front of the lense and bringing it to a halt at the exact moment that the shutter of the lense is open. The movement of the film is continuous from the *magazine* or fireproof box that holds the film and it is continuous at the *take-up* or lower magazine, where it is wound on another reel after it has passed through the machine, but a simple device causes the film to be drawn down bit by bit so that just one *frame* or one of the thousands of pictures on a piece of film is at rest as the lense is uncovered. The machine is generally turned by hand, though a motor can be used, and if you'll notice you will see that the operator makes one revolution of the crank every second. Every turn of the crank passes one foot of film through the machine, so we learn that in picture making a second is a foot and a foot is a second. That's about all the machine can teach us; let us find a seat and watch the screen. The picture that was running is about over, but a new one will start in a moment. Here it comes.

But at the start it is not a picture at all. It is an ornamental frame enclosing the name of the picture, the name of the maker and perhaps the name of author or producer or both. That seems to stay steady for a few seconds, but it doesn't. It was on the screen for ten seconds, so ten feet or about 150 different pictures of the *title* were shown in that time. Ten feet of title are used because it has been figured out that it takes the slow readers about ten seconds to spell out the title.

Now the first real picture is on the screen. It's a bachelor's den with the hero sitting in an easy chair smoking. As it is not a real room, but made from painted scenery, we speak of it as a *set* and because it shows a room and not some place outdoors it is an *interior*. Were it out of doors it would be an *exterior*. Made with scenery it would be an exterior set, but if it was really outdoors it would be a *location*.

The *scene* in the room only lasts a few seconds, though it seems longer, because that is one of the odd things about the silent picture. We were watching the bachelor in his den and in just one-sixteenth of a second we are in the library in the heroine's home. The girl goes to the table and sits down to write. We wonder what it is she is writing about and, as though in reply, a written letter blots out the library. It is just as though we read the letter over her shoulder. Presently the letter vanishes and we see the library again, but now we know, that the girl's name is Jane, that the man's name is Harry and that Jane is going to the country because her father wants her to stay and

meet an English lord whom he is anxious for her to marry. Jane doesn't want to marry him because she loves Harry, so she is running away. All of this was in the letter.

If it were just left to pictures alone we could, after a while, get the idea that Jane went to the country to get away from the noble suitor and that she loves Harry, but a million feet of pictures could not tell us that her name was Jane or that his was Harry. It has been done in twenty seconds in that letter.

When the picture was being put together in the factory, that library scene was all one straight piece of film, but at one point there was a mark that said "Insert letter No. 1," so a girl cut the piece of film in two and cemented the letter in, or inserted it, so that anything belonging to a scene that is not in the photograph of the scene is called an *insert*.

Now Jane calls her maid and gives her the letter. The maid leaves the room. [If this had been made five years ago we would have had a picture of the maid leaving Jane's house, another in which she is seen walking along the street and a third where she comes to Harry's house, but it was found that it looks just as real if the maid leaves Jane's library and comes into Harry's den, though we need one of those exterior scenes to show that Harry and Jane do not live in the same house. We might see her leaving Jane's house or coming to Harry's; since she comes to Harry's house we have an idea that this is done because the front of Harry's house will be used again and Jane's home will not be shown from the outside.]

The fourth scene is the same as that first one, where we saw Harry sitting smoking. The letter is brought him and he starts to read it. There it comes on the screen again, but this time we barely have time to read the "Dear Harry" when it is gone again. We know what is in the letter, so just a *flash* about three feet long is used.

Now the room vanishes and there comes on the screen some printed words that read: "The next day. Harry helps Jane to escape." We are going to see that he aids her escape, but we can't tell whether the escape is that same day or weeks afterward. There might, of course, have been a large calendar on the wall. In the first scenes it showed a large 10 and now Harry tears off a leaf and shows that it is the next day, but the passage of time is better told in print, and so a *leader* is used. Leader is also called *sub-title* and *interscription*, but leader is preferred.

The picture runs on. Jane has gone to the country and Harry stays home. Sitting in his room he thinks of her and as he does she seems to appear before him, at first just a shadowy outline,

but gradually growing more distinct, until it seems as though she was as real as Harry himself. Then she slowly fades away and Harry realizes with a sigh that it was just a day dream.

Jane has been *dissolved* into the picture and out again. Harry sinks back in his chair again and wonders what Jane is doing. Once more we see Jane, but this time we see not only Jane, but the orchard where she is sitting. This time Jane's figure is not so large, but the picture takes up almost a quarter of the screen. She comes and goes just as she did in the other appearance, but this time it is a *vision*. The vision differs from the dissolve in that a vision is distinct from the scene while in a dissolve whatever is shown is dissolved into the scene already showing. The first time we saw just Jane in the den. Now we see Jane in the orchard, so it is a vision since Jane and the orchard are quite apart from Harry in his den.

The next scene also shows Harry's room, but this time he is in evening dress because he is going to take dinner with Jane's father. That's why there was just a one word leader flashed on the screen that said "Later." Without that leader it would have seemed that Harry, sitting in the chair in a smoking jacket, suddenly sprang up and by the mere act of jumping had changed his clothes. It was the same room. The only thing changed would be Harry's clothes, because there would be no pause between the two scenes, so we *break* them with a leader. The leader only runs three seconds, but it acts like the drop curtain in a theater.

A moment later we get another sort of leader. Harry comes to Jane's home and meets the Count. We can guess that the old man says that this is Jane's husband to-be, for Harry stiffens up and a leader flashes on the screen. This time it is in quotation marks and says, "She will marry only an American."

All the other leaders have been between scenes, but this is right in the middle, so it is known as a "*cut-in leader*," because it is cut into the scene.

As the play runs along we find that the Count is not a nobleman at all, but just a thief who is after the jewels that he knows Jane's father keeps in the safe in the library. He coaxes the father to show him the jewels. As the safe is about to be locked, the Count jostles him and the key falls to the floor. The Count picks it up and makes a wax impression of it before he returns it.

We know that the wax impression was made because just as the Count started to rise it seemed as though the camera had been moved right up to the Count, so close that the lense would take in only his hands working with the cake of wax. This happened just as we were wishing that they would come closer so we

could see what the Count was doing. We knew it was something important, but we could not quite make it out. In the *bust* picture the hands were so large we could see every movement. Of course it might have been explained in a leader that "The Count makes an impression of the key," but the bust is more interesting because it is a picture and not a leader.

Properly speaking, a bust is a portrait showing the head and shoulders only, but bust is more definite than *close up*, which is sometimes used, for close up might also mean a full picture, but with the camera closer to the scene.

Harry knows what the Count is up to and when the false key is made and the Count is about to open the safe, he bursts into the room with Jane's father. The Count is unmasked and driven out of the house. In revenge he plans to abduct Jane. Harry learns about it too late to prevent it, but he goes tearing off in his car to the rescue. The father also learns of the plot and follows. It's a pretty lively three minutes that comes next. We see the Count rushing along, we see Harry following and then the Count and then Harry and then the father, then Harry and then the Count. There is not more than a second or two in each flash, but together they tell the story of the chase and its varying advantage until we are sitting almost on the edge of the seat.

Just a couple of pictures would have told the story, but using the *cut-back* or *switch-back* greatly heightens the suspense and keeps the story moving.

In the end Harry saves Jane from the Count and gets her father's consent to their marriage. It's the same old happy ending and we are glad of it. Now comes a *tail-piece*, a ten foot strip that announces that the picture has been passed by the National Board of Censorship. We are rather surprised, for several actions in this picture are among those barred by the Censors, but it has the *Censorship tag*, so it is all right.

The next picture is something of a novelty. A child is talking to an old man and points to a scar on his head. He smiles and begins to speak. A leader says "Once upon a time—" and we see the village common in war time and the young men ready to go to the front. There is not an abrupt change to the next scene, but the common dissolves into a scene in camp, this in turn dissolves into another picture and so until the story is done. Somehow it seems more like a story than it would have with each scene changing abruptly. We can gather that it is very much like that dissolve or the vision, but this time it is a *fade* because the whole scene changes.

In the next reel a girl goes from the library into the hall. We see her leave the room with her right hand on the knob and

the door opening toward her. In the hall her left hand is on the knob and the door is still opening toward her, though now it should be the other way. It is a blunder on the part of the director. He should have made a *match* on those scenes so that one corresponded to the other.

Later on the girl is in the fields and looks through a pair of binoculars. As the glass goes to her eyes we see a section of the country she is looking at; not a whole frame, but a part as though we were looking through a figure 8 laid on its side. We don't stop to think that it is not true to life. We think, almost, that we are looking through those glasses ourselves. A *mask* has been used to give the effect, and the scene was taken with that between the lense and the film.

Several of these scenes are *toned*, or *tinted*, some of them blue or light green for night and others a yellow for lamplight, but we notice one thing, they are pretty, but the photography is poor in every one of the toned scenes. That's because a night picture is underexposed, otherwise it would not differ in the least from a daylight picture. The toning helps a little; indeed some pictures not purposely underexposed, are toned to get a better effect, but it can never equal the good black and white.

But we've found out what most of the technical terms mean. Let's get out.

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### CHAPTER III.

## PRODUCING THE PHOTOPLAY

**Going the rounds—the rejection slip—causes for rejection—giving plenty of time—pricing the script—reconstruction—production.**

Suppose that you make one more trip before you settle down to work. Reduce yourself to a few sheets of typewritten paper, crawl into a manila envelope and with a return ticket in the shape of a stamped and addressed envelope, become a script and make the rounds.

You are the first manuscript of a very new author. You have your faults—serious ones—but you're not such a bad manuscript, at that. At the same time it was a mistake to send you off to the Moon Manufacturing Company. Your author should have known

that the Moon did only western stories. You're a polite little drama of eastern society life. You may be all right in your place, but the Moon studio is not your place. Ice water may command fabulous prices in the place of eternal torment, but no Esquimaus is going to pay a dollar a glass for ice water along in the middle of January. The secret of successful selling is to send the wares where they are wanted. Your author should have known that.

You get to the Moon studio in the morning mail along with about a hundred other scripts. The Editor's assistant takes your overcoat off and puts you on the desk with the others. At the Moon the Editor does all the reading and after he has things started for the day he begins to read.

You're a young and rather innocent script and you blush when the Editor says several very naughty cuss words in rapid succession, but you don't altogether blame him. He has come on a script with three of the middle pages lightly gummed together. You know that the Editor knows this was done "to see if the stories really are read." You are glad your author did not carry out his plan of sewing a couple of pages together for the same purpose.

The Editor sniffs at the next script. It is a pretty little thing, done with a two color ribbon, all the leaders and letters in red. The editor says he wishes that the author would put his time into his work instead of painting pictures with a bi-chrome ribbon, and back the script goes into the envelope. It might have made a real Moon story if there had been any real story there.

The third script is just glanced at. It is written with a pen and the Editor has no time to puzzle out the writing with ninety odd typewritten scripts waiting action. It may be a good story, but most people who can write good stories know enough to have them typed.

The next is a gem, lots of action, plenty of great big scenes, you are rather surprised to see it slip into the return envelope. "Not so bad," murmurs the Editor, "but where does that guy think we're going to borrow a submarine and a battleship in the Rocky Mountains!"

And so it goes, one story after another goes into its envelope and with each your hopes grow less. Your turn comes. Just a line or two and your synopsis tells your utter unfitness for that studio. Back you go with a rejection slip and the author wonders just what it means.

The slips all follow the same general form. The Editor regrets that you are not available for present needs and hopes that your author will try again. He is careful to state that rejection

does not imply lack of merit. It is rather a confusing statement to a man who does not know. You cannot tell your author that it is a simple form that covers every case and that it is sent to everyone, good and bad alike. It is neither encouraging nor discouraging. It is one of the most non-committal things in the world.

But your author does not know this, so you lie on the desk while he consults with his friends. His friends all tell him you are a great story. They do not know a good story from a poor one, but that does not matter. It is easier to tell your author that you are great than to be drawn into an argument. Smith, who runs the photoplay theater, casts the deciding vote. He tells the author that he only wishes that all the plays he gets were as good as that, and why are you not sent to the Planet?

Off your author hurries to send you to the Planet with the statement that Mr. Smith, of the Unique, suggested them because it is right in their style. The Planet Editor smiles a weary smile. He knows that Smith is thinking of the tickets he can sell your author. Smith doesn't know much more about unproduced scripts than your author does, but he is enough of a showman to cry "Great!" instead of "Worthless!"

That you happen to be for a man lead and the Planet prefers scripts that feature their leading women is something that doesn't bother Smith, but it does bother the Editor and you go home again. By now the author knows you must be good and you go right out again.

This time you have the novel sensation of being read. Your synopsis looks rather attractive to the Constellation company and your action is glanced over. The Editor puts you back in your envelope. "I wish I had time to fix that up. It's not half bad."

That's your epitaph there. You are not half bad, but you are not much more than half good and the Editor cannot spend a day getting you straightened out.

You are turned down at the Bear because they have plenty of dramas and want only comedies, and you stay five weeks at the Lion company, most of the time in the pocket of a director who is trying to get the time and the courage to fix you up. Then your author writes a sharp letter and wants to know all about it, and the Editor tells the director that the author is yelling for his script and the director says to let the author have it. You stood a good chance, but your author spoiled it by being impatient. By the time you have been the rounds your author forgets and sends you to the Bear again. This time they have all the comedy they need and want dramas. A director takes you around with him to read and gets a chance in a few days.

"How much is it worth?" asks the Editor, pointing to your first page where your author has neatly typed the fact that you are offered for sale for \$100.

"Offer him ten dollars," suggests the producer with a laugh. "Any man that don't know better than to ask a hundred for a script like this will be glad to take anything."

"Make it fifteen," suggests the Editor. "He'll learn after a while." Being a script and not a person you know that's because five or six years ago the Editor used to do the same thing and has a fellow feeling, perhaps, for your author.

You go back into the director's pocket marked "Hold" and the author gets a letter making the offer and enclosing a release slip. This slip, stripped of its legal phrasing, is an assignment of copyright and all other rights and the flat statement that the author is the originator of the work. In the event of a proven theft it is also an admission that the signer has obtained money under false pretenses. The slip is returned signed and witnessed. Some companies might have sent a slip that must be sworn to before a notary.

Notice that the copyright and all other rights pass to the company. Possibly, being also a short story writer, you have reserved the fiction rights. In that case you will make no sale because most companies want the right to the fiction form of the story since many magazines now use photoplay-fiction stories.

The fiction rights are not worth much, at best. Photoplay audiences will accept the visualization of a story, but the general run of magazines do not want the fictionized photoplay because they have found that only in magazines printing little else than this form of story will such matter be found acceptable.

Some time ago Bannister Merwin arranged a test with the Munsey Company which printed some of his stories from the Edison photoplays. They were resented by many readers.

This does not apply to the What Happened to Mary series, because these were printed just before the photoplay was released.

The check is sent and you have become the property of the company. You are rather glad of it. You have traveled thousands of miles and have spent from one day to six weeks in practically every studio in the country.

Now the producer starts to reconstruct you. He takes your best scenes and builds up around these. He puts in the punch you have so sadly lacked, he builds up and he tears down. In some studios this reconstruction might have been made in the Editor's office, but the process is the same. The good idea is taken and a real story is built on the wreck of the old.

Now the *property* and *scene plots* are prepared. Plot is merely another name for list. The property plot is nothing more than a list of all the things needed in your production whether it be a safety pin or a gattling gun. Some properties the studio owns, others are borrowed or rented.

The scene plot is the list of sets needed. Generally diagrams are made of the sets, either in free hand or to scale. In the latter way paper lightly ruled into squares is used. Each of these squares represents a square foot of space. At one point a line is drawn across six of these squares. This is known as the *front line* and corresponds to the footlights of the dramatic stage. The Editor knows that the lense his cameraman uses will just take in the six foot line if placed twelve and a half feet back of the line. Along the middle line of the six he measures off twelve and a half squares. A line drawn from this point through the sides of the six foot line and beyond will give a triangle that exactly corresponds to the angle of the lense. Anything within these lines is in the picture, anything outside is not. When the picture is to be taken these *lines* are laid down in some way, either by mentally marking the direction of the line, by nailing down strips of wood or running tape lines. The player who does not keep within these lines is said to fall out of the picture.

While the property man is working over the property plot or "prop" list, the stage carpenter is planning the settings with the director, either using regular sets or having new scenes painted. The position of each piece of furniture is determined and a drawing made for each set, but not for each scene.

The players are notified as to the costumes and wigs they will need. Street dress of today must be furnished by the player. The company supplies foreign costumes or the dress of another period. The players may be told something of the play, but some directors do not permit their people to know the plot and it is entirely possible for an actor to take the leading part in a play and not be able to more than vaguely guess at the story.

When the first set is put in place and dressed to the satisfaction of the director, the players in the scenes in that set are called. This set may be that used for the first scene or for one in the middle or toward the end. The scenes are not played in regular order but are put on to suit the conditions of the moment. The last scene may be played first and then scene two, but all the scenes in one set are played before that set is *struck* and another is *set*, set being both a verb and a noun.

The players are rehearsed in one scene at a time and this may be gone through with once or ten times or a hundred until the

director is satisfied. The players are given no parts but simply do what the director tells them to.

When the scene is rehearsed to the satisfaction of the director, he gives orders to *turn* the camera. In a *light studio* the illumination comes from mercury vapor tubes, arc lights or a combination of the two. In the *daylight studio* arc lights supplement the sun on cloudy days only. In the South and West the scenes are set on platforms in the open air, light cloth screens cutting off the sun when the light is too brilliant.

*open studios  
H. Tracy  
W. S. C.*

The camera is provided with two boxes or *magazines* with velvet lined slots through which the film passes in or out. The film is much the same as that used in hand cameras save that it comes in strips two hundred feet long and only  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches wide. The actual picture, or frame, is only one inch wide and three-fourths of an inch high. The film passes from the top box, down through the camera into the lower box, each section being halted for an instant in front of the lense while the exposure is made. Sixteen pictures are made each second.

In American production it is the aim of the director to keep his leading players as close to the front line as possible, and for practical playing purposes the stage consists of a space six feet wide and about four feet deep. There all of the important action must occur so that the figures may be large and the expressions distinct. This small stage makes it necessary to cut off the legs of the players and sometimes the top of their heads. It is inartistic, but it is what is demanded, so the *photographic stage* holds all the action though, in exteriors scenes, especially, the actual stage may be vastly larger.

The scene is played through before the camera and the next rehearsed and taken until all the scenes in that set are made. Then the players may rest while a new set is made or they may go out and take some of the outside scenes, appropriate locations having been selected by the director's assistant.

The exposed film is sent to the developing room where it is developed and one print made of each scene. In the meantime the *leader room* has had a list of all leaders and inserts. These are written, printed or painted as may be required and these are printed along with the other negative. From this *first print* the director or someone else *joins up* the print. Starting with the title the first scene is cemented on and the scenes added in their proper order, all inserts and cut-in leaders being put in their place.

The first print, properly joined goes to the *cutting room* where the film is *edited*. Here the print is repeatedly run through the projector and the small details are made right. Scenes that are at fault are condemned and *retakes* are ordered. Loose ends are cut

out and leader is removed or added as circumstances may seem to require. The approved print goes back to the negative department where the negative is marked exactly to correspond with the first print and sent to the *printing room* where the necessary number of prints are made from each piece. These are sent to the *joining room* where girls cement or *splice* the scenes together, after which the reels are inspected and if properly joined are shipped to the exchanges.

You have ceased to be a manuscript. You have become a film.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

### TOOLS OF THE TRADE

What is required—the proper paper—necessity for typewriting—envelopes—manuscript record—mailing the script—things to be avoided.

Having gained some knowledge of technical terms and an idea of studio methods, we are ready to turn our attention to the making of the script, but a good workman needs good tools and while the tools of the photoplay trade are few, it is important that they be good.

A manuscript written on butcher's wrapping paper in red ink may be a literary gem, but as a rule it's unlikely that the script will repay reading and so it will be passed over. It is argued that the man who knows how to write a good script knows also how to give that script the proper attention. So small a thing as a paper too thin may spoil the chances of acceptance.

Today a typewriter is the first essential. When the demand for good stories greatly exceeded the supply, the editors were willing to read the script so long as it was written in ink and with a fairly legible hand. There was always the hope of finding a new idea, but now that time is passed and it is very logically argued that the man who does not know enough to have his manuscript typed does not know enough to hit upon a good idea.

It is possible to have the manuscript typed by some professional stenographer for ten or fifteen cents a page, but it is far better to do your own work and it is by no means as difficult as it seems to a person who has never tried.

It is recommended that a machine be hired for a time. Every city has rental agencies where a machine may be hired for five dollars for three months. Generally this first deposit may apply

to the purchase price if you later wish to buy the machine for cash or on time payments. This machine will be plenty good enough to learn upon and when you are really proficient, you can make a choice of a new machine or get a better "rebuilt" machine.

All makes of machines are good provided that you get a machine that in new condition costs \$50 or more. Most of the good ones cost \$100. Visit a rental agency, pick out a machine that appeals to you. Try it for a time and if you do not like the make take it back and get another until you find one that does suit you. It is recommended that one with visible writing be selected, but it is not so important whether it have one or two shift keys. The one shift keyboard is simpler but the use of two shifts is not found confusing by most writers. The single shift carries an extra row of keys, and but two instead of three characters to each key.

The main thing in learning is to avoid developing bad habits. When you get the machine get a book on the touch system. This will enable you to use more than one finger on each hand and to watch your work instead of the keys. The touch system is the only one for writers and you will develop proficiency in a short time if you keep at it.

Use black record ribbons. There are two kinds of ribbons, record and copying. You will have no use for the copying ribbon. That is for use where the typed letters are copied into a letter book with wet sheets. The ink is softer and smears badly. Get the record and use nothing else. The record ribbon will not last so long, but the cost is comparatively slight and it is worth half a dollar every two months. Do not use a ribbon so long that it writes grey instead of black. Change when the imprint gets light. Some writers cut their ribbon into two pieces and always have a half old ribbon and a half new one on the machine, using the old half for practice and the new for copying. Black is recommended because it is easiest read. The only excuse for a colored ribbon is when you use a colored paper and ribbon to match, but even here it is better not to use other than a black ribbon. If the machine you get uses the two color ribbons, get a double black and when the upper half is exhausted, use the other half; getting double use. The red and black is of no use for script work and leaders, scenes, etc., should not be put in with red.

At the first, at any rate, it is best to stick to white paper.

The paper most suitable for use is a twenty pound bond. This is a bond paper weighing twenty pounds to the ream, 17 by 22 inches. This is cut into fours and gives four sheets each 8½ by 11. This is the only proper size of paper to use. A very few

fiction authors use paper 8½ by 5½ but this is not good for scripts. The usual commercial note and the legal 8½ by 13 are equally bad and the 8 by 10½ looks cheap and "skimpy." Until you need a lot of paper it is better to get it by the box of 500 sheets, but when you get fairly into the writing of scripts, it will pay you to go to some paper warehouse and order a full ream to be cut for you. The saving will be 25 or 30%.

Do not get heavier than twenty pound paper because a heavier paper will increase your postage bills and stamps are the costliest item at best. Do not use lighter because you will not get a paper that will stand handling. No paper should be so thin that when one sheet is laid on top of a second, the writing on the second shows through. The paper must be opaque or the editor will have trouble reading it and is inclined to return it unread.

To use "onion skin" or other tissues is the height of foolishness. These tissues are made for use where a large number of carbons must be done at one writing. Some beginners use it to save postage, but there is no saving effected where your scripts are not read. Onion skin should never be allowed in the workshop of the author.

For carbon copies get the carbon second sheets. This paper is thin but since it is purely for home use it does not matter. It will cost from forty cents for five hundred sheets down to about twenty. It is best to get a yellow or manila paper for your carbons, then if you are careful to face your carbon to the colored paper you can never get your carbon in wrong. This seems a slight matter, but it is one of the little tricks that will save time and trouble.

You will need carbon paper to match your carbon sheets. Some papers require a soft carbon paper and others work better with the hard finish. Get a couple of sheets of each to test and buy in larger quantities later on. If you make more than two carbon copies you will have to use the soft carbon paper for the lower sheets in the pack, but it is not probable that you will make more than a single carbon.

Get two sizes of envelopes, known to the trade as No. 10 and 11, unless you can find a ten and a half. Do not use white envelopes. These look nicer, but unless you get an expensive grade of bond paper envelope or use the costly cloth lined envelopes, the white paper should not be used. The powerful bleaching agents employed to get the white rots the paper and the envelope does not hold together in the mail as well as a manila or craft paper. These latter range in price all the way from thirty to sixty cents a hundred.

Just as the 8½ by 11 paper is the only size to use, so are the ten and eleven envelopes the only proper sizes. The smaller No. 9 will just hold a small script, but they are unhandy. Larger sizes will not travel well. Do not, in any circumstances, use photomailers, as some still do.

Printed paper is an expensive luxury, not a necessity, more especially at the first. Instead get a rubber stamp with your name in a 12 point gothic or other plain type and the address in ten point. Do not get smaller sizes, and avoid fancy type faces. Legibility is to be desired rather than ornamentation.

A typewriter eraser, some clips and a supply of postage stamps will complete your initial outfit. Do not, at the start, get a cheap spring postal scales. Get your letters weighed at the post office until your business warrants the purchase of a regular post office scale with a beam and sliding weight instead of a spring and pointer. The scale will cost you three dollars, but you'll save that in postage in a couple of years if you send much out.

Later on you will need some sort of manuscript record, but at the start you'll know the history of each script by heart. Many systems have been devised, but one that has given satisfaction to this writer for the past twenty years is in use by many prominent fiction and photoplay writers and gives general satisfaction.

Get one of the wooden card-file boxes that may be had of almost any stationer for fifty cents. With the box you get one hundred record cards and twenty-five index cards with tabs rising above the edge for one-fifth the length of the card. Procure also a ten-cent dating stamp.

Reverse these index cards so that the blank face is presented to the front of the box. On the first of these write "Live." The back card should be lettered "Paid" and the one just before that "Accepted." Letter the others with the names of the companies with which you hope to do business.

Give each script a number. If you do not wish to start with number one, start with 51 or 101, but after that number in consecutive order.

Put this number on your script and number one of the white record cards. These cards have a red line at the top and then ten blue lines. Number at the left hand side of the top, above the red line. Then type in the title of the story. On the first blue line type the name of the company most likely to accept that style of story. On the second that of the next most likely company is written and so until you have exhausted the list of likely buyers or have written the ten names. Send the story to the studio first on the list and with the dating stamp mark in the date.

Suppose that you send it first to the Vitagraph. That name comes first on the list, so you send the story there and stamp the date of sending. It went out December 6th and came back the tenth. You stamp the date of return and find that Lubin is the next choice. You send the script to Lubin and stamp the date there. It comes back from there and goes to Edison only to come back again, but Essanay, the fourth choice accepts it.

Each time you send out you change the card. At first it lies in the Vitagraph division, it is moved in turn to Lubin, Edison and Essanay divisions and when Essanay writes you that they will pay you \$20 for it, you take it out of Essanay and put it under "Accepted." When the check comes you take it out of "Accepted" and permanently file it under "Paid." At the same time you take a white card and mark it Essanay. On the first blue line you write the number of the story, the date and the amount. In the course of time you will have a record of all the sales you have made to Essanay and a quick reference to the "Paid" division will tell just what stories they were. When all these transactions have been completed, your card shows the complete history of the script. If you want to enlarge the system to a higher degree get a pack of colored cards (you can get a choice of six or eight colors), and give each division one of these colored cards. Put down the number of each story sent, the date of going and return. Presently you will have a record of your Essanay or Edison transactions and can tell from these cards how much you have sent, what proportion you have sold, how much you get on the average and how long it takes them to handle a story when it is returned and when they accept. Your story record card will look something like this:

123—	Going Home to Mother	Half reel farce
Vitagraph	Dec 6 1912	Dec 10 1912
Lubin	Dec 10 1912	Dec 28 1912
Edison	Dec 30 1912	Feb 6 1913
Essanay	Feb 6 1913	
Reliance		
Imp	Accepted Mar 4 1913	\$20
Keystone	Paid Mar 16 1913	

Under this system there is no danger of sending the same script to the same company twice unless it is your intention to do so. It is simpler than using the alphabetical file, and more satisfactory in many ways. Scripts that come in and are not immediately sent out again are held under "Live," where they are under your notice, and by watching your "Accepted" division you know what

is due and from whom. By filing the stories out under companies you know what each one has at any time.

Your carbon copies can be filed in a cheap pasteboard letter file with the file divisions removed, the carbons being filed in numerical order, or each carbon can be folded and filed in a cheap grade manila envelope and these kept in a drawer in regular order.

Some writers use the envelope to carry the history of the script, all data being written on the face of the envelope, but this system is less flexible. Other systems are advocated using printed cards or envelopes, but no provision is made in these for removing dead names or adding live ones and printed cards or envelopes are not recommended.

Manuscript covers are not generally used. They frequently add to the postage cost, but they undoubtedly save the script from rough usage. Cover paper is a stout paper coming in a dozen different shades. The paper comes nine by fifteen inches and should be cut to nine by twelve and one-quarter. Turn over one inch of the paper at the top and clip all the white sheets under this fold, then fold as usual. The back may be printed or filled in with typewritten data. Here is a good form:

Title of story here.		
Farce	Comedy	Drama
Interior scenes in		sets
Exterior scenes in		locations
Busts		
Total scenes		

The name and address of the author can follow. One writer who uses printed covers adds a list of possible causes for rejection and requests that one be checked.

In filling in the above form, a hyphen will give you farce—comedy or comedy-drama, making five combinations, the others being crossed off. Below you state the number of scenes the sets or locations, bust scenes and the total number of scenes.

Fancy covers, printed stationery and other wrinkles of this sort should be left alone until you are satisfied that you can sell and *keep on selling*. Until then back your script with a sheet of plain typewriter paper and put another sheet in front with only the title of the story, your name and address. These sheets will take up the wear and tear and save you the labor of much copying. They can be replaced after each return and the script sent out looking fresh.

We are rather anticipating the writing of the script, but mailing the script may as well be described here.

Back your manuscript in one of the ways described and clip all together with a single Niagara clip. *Use only one.* Any other form of clip may be used that does not perforate the paper as does the OK and similar clips. Do not use a staple, McGill or similar fastener or bind the paper permanently in any form. Put the clip at the top of the sheets and not at the side. Above all, do not sew or glue the sheets together into book form. The Editor can read the story best by slipping off the clip and handling the loose sheets. It will also avoid the crumpling of your script and ensure its return in the best possible shape.

The last thing before your clip is put on assure yourself that the sheets are in their proper order. Do not mix them up to see if they have been read. The editor has to read only the synopsis to tell if he does not want the script.

Fold the script twice, into thirds, making a package  $8\frac{1}{2}$  by  $3\frac{3}{4}$  inches and slip this into a number ten envelope addressed to yourself and carrying a two cent stamp. Do not seal this envelope and do not tuck the flap in.

Place this envelope, *flap down*, into a larger envelope; the number eleven. By placing the flap down there is less danger of the sharp letter opener mutilating the return envelope. Seal the number eleven and address it to the manuscript department of the firm to which you wish to send it. Do not address this envelope to the Editor personally, to the director or to any member of the firm. It will not help any and may delay the reading.

Make absolutely certain, by weighing, and by no other way, that the envelope is sufficiently well provided with stamps. Some companies will not accept underpaid matter from the post office.

Manuscript classes as first class or letter mail, the postage on which is two cents for each ounce or fraction of an ounce. If your script does not weigh an ounce and a half, but is over one ounce, put on four cents, do not put on three cents. The postage is either two, or four or six cents, etc.

Do not under any circumstances nor at any time, ever, for any possible or conceivable reason, roll your manuscript, and do not write on both sides of a sheet of paper. If you must add even one line, do not turn the sheet over, take a fresh sheet.

You may send two or more scripts in the same envelope, but provide a return cover for *each* script. They may desire to retain one script and return the other.

It is not necessary to send a letter with your script. The editor knows that you are sending him the script in the hope that he will buy it. He knows that without being told. You have nothing

else to tell the Editor. Do not spoil your chances of acceptance by writing gushy letters and do not try the sympathetic appeal by telling the Editor that you are trying to pay your way through college or you want to earn enough money to buy mother a wooden leg. The studio is not a charitable bureau and the Editor will think you are untruthful, so don't write.

Above all things, do not write that it is a "true" story. He can see whether or not it is a good story and that is all he wants to know.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE FORM OF THE PHOToplay

The three divisions of photoplay form—the synopsis—the cast—the action—the need for a brief synopsis—synopses only—the scene plot.

Photoplay form is not a printed blank form on which plays should be written as many seem to suppose from the letters they send asking for some of the forms. Photoplay form is merely the form in which the photoplay should be written. This form varies slightly in the different studios, but the form here given is the one most generally used with such slight variations as the personal preference of the editor or director may dictate.

The three essentials of the photoplay are the *Synopsis*, the *Cast* and the *Plot of Action*. Some studios require a property plot and writers, who are reasonably certain that their plays will be followed add a scene plot for the convenience of the director, but the synopsis, cast and plot of action only are essential. The scene and property plots are useless unless prepared by one who understands precisely what is wanted and a scene plot is useless, save to give a hint as to the number of scenes, unless the play is so developed that the director follows the script exactly.

It is customary to write the plot of action first and the synopsis afterward, and it is best to follow this plan even in clean copying the rough script, since some good point may suggest itself even at the last moment. In any event the plot of action should start on a fresh page. It is not necessary to number these pages as the scene numbers answer the purpose as well.

In preparing the synopsis page, type your name and address in the upper left hand corner and in the right hand corner either state that the manuscript is offered "At usual rates" or state that it is "Offered at \$25" or whatever value you place upon it. You must

either offer at usual rates or state your price. Do not ask for an offer. Now and then an Editor will negotiate as to price, but as a rule the manuscript that is submitted subject to agreement as to price is returned without a reading.

At usual rates means that you send the script for sale subject to whatever price the company may decide the script to be worth. Most of the professional authors follow this plan because most of them have found that they profit in the long run. They may get less for one story than they think it is worth, but on the other hand a story often brings more than the anticipated sum.

You have your name and address in one corner and "At usual rates" in the other. In writing your name and address (use a rubber stamp if you have one) write the first character of the second line under the first character of your name and do not string it out as in addressing a letter. The top of the sheet will look like this:

JOHN E. JONES,  
453 Blank street,  
Nowhere, N. Y.

At usual rates

Now turn your platen until you get the paper to a point where the line is an inch and a half or two inches from the top of your sheet. Write your title, not in capital letters, but with a capital to start each important word, keeping the two and three letter words in lower case. The all capital line is not as easy to read. It is better to gain emphasis by underlining the title with the proper character.

The title should be printed in the centre of the page. If you have experience you may be able to do this off hand, but unless you are able, you will find this rule handy: Count each letter and space in the title. Subtract this from the number of spaces your machine writes. Divide what remains by two, add one and start the first character there.

Suppose that your title is Going Home to Mother. That is twenty letters and spaces. Twenty from seventy-five leaves fifty-five. Half of that is twenty-seven and a half. Call it twenty-seven, add one and start the G on space twenty-eight on your scale.

If you wish you can give a brief announcement under the title such as:

A farce comedy in 19 scenes, requiring 8 interior scenes  
and 8 exterior locations.

This is not required, but it gives the Editor some idea of what is needed in the way of settings. You might amplify this a little and say:

A farce comedy in 18 scenes; 5 in 3 interior sets; 14 in 8 exterior locations.

Now turn up four spaces, or lines, write the word Synopsis, turn two more spaces and start the synopsis.

But first let's get a clear understanding of just what the synopsis is and what it should not be. When you pick up a newspaper you see in large type certain lines that give you at a glance the real meat of the article. It's a synopsis of that newspaper story. It says perhaps "Twenty persons killed." It doesn't give their names unless one or more of the victims are of unusual prominence. It just says that twenty persons are killed. If you wish to know who they are, you must read the story. The fact that twenty persons were killed makes the story more interesting than if there had been no loss of life.

Now that's just about what your synopsis should be, but since you have 250 words instead of perhaps 50 and do not need to break up your heading into sections or "decks," you can make it more of a running story, but you plan your synopsis on the same lines. You say that twenty persons are killed, but you do not use just that line. Perhaps Jim gets in a tight place and gets out again in a clever way. You do not give every detail of how Jim gets out of trouble. You have not the space to tell all the details. You say instead: Jim gets his father to pretend to make love to Nell and by pretending to be jealous brings about a quarrel that makes Nell forget her suspicions. That's the big fact. You don't have to tell in the synopsis just how Jim goes about it and precisely how the father makes love.

In a word your synopsis is *not* a fiction form of your action story. It is just a sort of advertisement of that story so briefly told that the Editor can get the idea in a minute or two. If he likes the idea he'll read the action and if the action bears out the promise of the synopsis, he'll buy the story. Make it snappy, point to all the good things, but don't make it windy and draggy. Make it short and attractive. Word it to get the interest of the reader, whether he is Editor or producer.

Some writers make a sort of synopsis of the synopsis. They start off with a couple of lines, something like this:

A happy little farce comedy. Maudie quarrels with Ferdie and goes right home to her Ma, but Ma doesn't want her because she is planning to marry Major Webb, so Maudie goes back to Ferdie and everybody's happy.

Now they follow with a little more detail, and give a few of the facts, something like this:

Maudie hasn't been married very long and she can't get used to having Ferdie read the baseball page at the breakfast table, so one morning she tears up the paper before he gets a chance to see if the home team's crack pitcher is better or dead. That would make any fan mad, and you can't blame Ferdie for breaking a few dishes and saying a few things. It's the first quarrel and off Maudie goes to Ma. She expects to cry all her sorrows out on the maternal shoulder, but Ma is busy. She's a widow and not so old. Now that Maudie is off her hands she has a chance to marry Major Webb. Maudie gets home so late that night that Ferdie does not know of her return. She hides when he comes down to breakfast, but when Ferdie finds the paper propped up against the carafe and open at the sporting page he guesses the rest and for once he forgets to read the paper in his delight at getting Maudie back.

Don't you think that a synopsis like this would interest the Editor more than a story that starts off "Ferdie, a rich young broker, marries Maude, the daughter of Mrs. Sprague, a widow. Ferdie is a baseball fan and we see him in the first scene sitting at the breakfast table reading the paper and hardly speaking to Maude. When she speaks to him he gets angry. The next scene shows the same thing the next morning. Maude tries to get him to talk and when he will not, she tears up his paper. He gets mad and smashes the dishes and things, the maid comes in and he throws a roll at her. She runs out and Ferdie goes off to the office without kissing Maude. She cries and decides to go home to her mother," etc.

Keep it terse and you'll not complain that your story has not been read. It will be read and read with interest if you make it interesting, but when the Editor starts to read he may have three or four hundred scripts that have accumulated and he has not the time to wade through two or three pages of synopsis. He wants the main points of the story at a glance.

A limit of 250 words is set in most studios and in some the long synopsis will be returned with a request for the shorter length. The 250 word limit was first used by the Edison company because all of its Editors received a copy of the synopsis of

each likely story. Other studios took up the limit as a convenient standard and because any one reel story and most two and three reel stories can be fully covered in that length. The synopsis of the multiple reel story may run slightly longer if it is necessary, but it should not be necessary.

Occasionally a company will advertise for synopses only. In this case some studio writer develops the plots into a working script and the plot of action is not sent. In such a case it is permissible to exceed 250 word limit and run a thousand if necessary to get the idea over clearly.

Short synopses should be single spaced. The synopsis, when sent alone, should be double spaced.

One great fault of the beginner is to put only into the synopsis the explanations that should appear in action or leader in the plot of action. It is safe to say that a third of the scripts received at any studio will carry points in the synopsis that are not in the action at all and which must be put in by the Editor or producer if the script is accepted. It should be remembered that the Editor and the producer are the only persons who see the synopsis and that the audiences are also entitled to this information. If you say that Jane marries John because she has quarreled with Harry, show the quarrel and add in a leader that Jane accepts John in a fit of anger. The producer can put it into the action when he finds it in the synopsis; he must in order to have the story clear, but it is your business to do that work. That is what you are paid to do.

It is a good plan, where possible, to get some frank and intelligent friend to read the action without having any knowledge of the synopsis, and see if the action tells the full story.

The cast is pretty much the same as the program of a dramatic performance save that if necessary you add a suggestion as to the type of character. You do not merely say that John Smith is Jim's father if it is important to the story that Smith walks with a limp. You add that fact in the cast, but if it is clearly shown in the script that John Smith is quick tempered and hasty, you do not need to add that in the cast. Some casts need nothing more than the names of the players, as in this case:

John-  
Mary-  
John's father-  
Mary's mother-  
Policeman-  
Maid-  
Messenger boy-

Every character should be cast, no matter how unimportant, unless a crowd is used, when each member of the crowd is not indicated but merely the fact that a crowd is needed.

If a large cast is employed and many of the characters appear but once or twice, it is well to number the scenes in which they appear, that the director may "double" them, having one player take two or more parts with the aid of the disguising make-up. The leading characters, the first four or five, who appear in a majority of the scenes, are not numbered. Only the minor characters should be so identified.

Here is such a cast properly done.

John Smith-  
Mary Morton-  
Henry Smith-John's father.  
Anna-his mother.  
Maid-in 3-9  
Cook-in 8-11-15  
Butler-in 8-9  
Letter carrier-14

If the director is working with a small company he knows that he can have the same woman play the maid and the cook and that the same man can be the smooth shaven butler and the bearded postman.

The best way to keep track of these appearances is to keep a slip of paper beside your typewriter. On this enter the name of a character as soon as used. Then, at each appearance of the minor characters, note the scene number. When you have done you have a list of the characters in the order of their appearance. All that is necessary is to pick out the leading characters and write them in the cast first and then follow with the subordinate characters. Do not attempt to double the characters. Leave that to the director. And if you have in mind a play that will just suit a particular company, do not give the names of the persons whom you desire to play the leading roles.

And do not seek to impose upon the director your exact idea of the characters. Sometimes it is necessary that this should be done where a character must be of a certain type, but do not say that the heroine has blue eyes and blonde hair when the part would suit a brunette just as well, and do not ask for a hero six feet tall when one five feet, eleven inches will be just as good.

If you use the scene plot keep a memorandum of the scenes on a slip as advised for the cast, but check these up before you enter them on the synopsis page. The scene plot is merely a list of

scenes and the number of the scenes played in each. For convenience the interiors and the exteriors should be kept separate. The scenes may be written in two columns or one, as preferred. Where there are many and the space is limited, it is better to use two columns. If you have plenty of space write the interiors first and then give the exteriors. Samples of both of these are given here. The reproduction will be found self explanatory.

Scene plot	
Interior	Exterior
Parlor-1-3-5	Street-7
Library-2-4-9-11-13	Exterior of house-8-10-12
Hallway-6-14-16	Lawn-15
	Shore of lake-17
	Boat house-18

If the other form is used, it will look like this:

Scene plot	
Interior	
Parlor-1-3-5	
Library-2-4-9-11-13	
Hallway-6-14-16	
Exterior	
Street-7	
Exterior of house-8-10-12	
Lawn-15	
Shore of lake-17	
Boat house-18	

If the director follows your script he will check off each scene as made and at the same time see what the next scene is.

If you have several scenes showing the library and want one of these to show just a corner of the library with the figures much larger than would be possible without moving the camera, you write that as a separate scene, for a scene is all the action that may be taken at one time without moving the camera or stopping the turning. The camera is stopped and moved for the fireplace so we have

Library-3-7-9-12-14  
Close up of corner of same-13

It is not recommended that a property list be written, unless some company particularly asks for it. The property plot lists all

things used in the play by scenes. Everything used in this scene must be called for. Here is a sample list for one scene:

PARLOR IN MAY'S HOME- Rugs- round table- arm chair- sofa- two armless chairs- cover for table- books for same- book case- books for same- fancy lamp for table- vases for book case- one painting- two etchings- wall telephone- sure fire revolver on table- sure fire revolver for John- suit case for maid- bottles and glasses on tray off.

Sure fire revolvers means that the weapons are to be discharged. The bottles and glasses are "off" because they are brought into the scene after the camera is started. The suitcase is for the maid, because, while it belongs to John, she brings it in, and the property man must give the "hand properties" or those carried to the person indicated.

Property lists, "director's sheets" and similar devices are fads of no real value when prepared by the beginner. The director's sheet is a condensed memorandum of the action by scenes and is used only by certain men who profess to be indifferent to the script and direct "out of their own head."

Properly done the synopsis, cast and scene plot will all go on a single page. If necessary, two may be used, but it should not be necessary.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE PLOT OF ACTION

**Necessity for orderly arrangement—impossible to go back—introducing and identifying the characters—the start and the finish important.**

Since the photoplay is a story told in action instead of words, it follows that the story must be fully told in action with the aid of leaders and inserted matter.

If you were writing a story you might start it something like this:

"Then you do not love me! You never did love me!"

Reginald Montmorenci cried these words in the tones of one whose heart is breaking as he staggered back from the proud beauty who stood facing him, cold and defiant.

"No," was Gwendolyn's even answer. "It is perhaps as well that you should know the truth now. I do not love you. I never did love you, and it is useless to hope that I can learn. You and my

parents forced me into this hateful marriage. I was forced into it, sold to you, if you will have it that way."

Then the story goes backward and tells all about Gwendolyn, about Reginald, about Percy, who is the man she really loves, the courtship of Reginald and all the rest. That's possible, because you can jump about as much as you like in a book and merely explain that this is something that happened five years ago.

You cannot do this in photoplay. Photoplay is the record of life and when properly produced it seems a bit of life itself. To run along for a time and then suddenly explain that the next scene happened a week ago is as unreal as moving last Thursday over into next Friday. The scene that happens Friday must be shown before the scene that happens on Saturday and you must show what happened at nine o'clock before that which happens at half past ten. If you do not you will get your audience so badly mixed that they will lose interest in the plot and vote the play tiresome. You must start with your first scene, show each action in its proper place clear through to the climax and then drop the play as quickly as possible. You cannot explain in scene nineteen that along about scene five Jack was married to Mabel. Let your audience see the marriage if you would have the matter understood.

Not only must each scene be played in chronological order, but each scene should aid in advancing the plot. Do not write in scenes because they will be pretty or because they will give a thrill. Write the essential scenes in pretty settings, if you will, and get all the thrills you can by making these thrills a part of the actual story.

Before you start to write the script think out your action. Get the story running smoothly in your mind and, until you have gained experience, it is better to write out a reasonably full scenario.

And please note we use scenario in its proper sense. A scenario is a brief sketch of the plot of a story. A few years ago scenario was used to apply to all photoplay scripts, but the use of the word in that sense is incorrect. It is one of the misnomers brought into the business by the stage managers and players.

The scenario gives you a general idea of the action as you wish it to run, but it is a running story, much like a long synopsis. Now you must work from the scenario and develop the plot of action.

Before you start be absolutely certain that your start is the proper one. You have only fifteen to eighteen minutes at best and you cannot waste time on a lot of meaningless scenes that precede the real start of the story. Start with the first scene

that really starts to tell the story you want to tell. There may be a lot of interesting things that happened before that, but you have not the time in which to tell them. Jump right into the story.

Suppose that John loves Nell but can't marry her until he can sell his invention and have as much money as her father has. Don't have a scene showing John in his humble home, a second in Nell's palatial residence, a third showing John starting out to meet Nell, a fourth showing Nell setting forth to keep the appointment and a fifth showing the meeting. Show the meeting as the first scene. His clothes and hers tell of their different stations in life and you'll emphasize this later when you have real reason to show the two homes.

Suppose that you run the scene something like this. John and Nell meet. They are interrupted by Mr. Morton, Nell's father, who is highly indignant. He tells John that if he catches him with Nell again he will have him thrashed, bundles Nell into the automobile and they exit, leaving John standing there.

Get your white sheet and carbon and carbon sheet into the machine and put down your name and address, just as you did in the synopsis sheet. You do not repeat "At usual rates."

Below, and in the centre, type in the name of the story. Under that write Plot of Action. Raise the roller two spaces. Now change your left hand margin stop so that when you push the carriage up you stop at the 5 instead of the o. Now with the stop there press the margin release and bring the carriage so that you will print at o and make the Arabic figure 1. Do not use Roman numerals. The director knows that XVIII means 18, but it is not as easy to read. Try and keep things as simple as possible in every way. Make a dash after the figure with the hyphen mark and then write in the important action of that first scene. You should get something like this:

JOHN E. JONES,  
453 Blank street,  
Nowhere, N. Y.

The Price of Pride

Plot of Action

- 1- Park- John on- impatient- car enters- Nell leaves car- comes to John- lovers' greetings- they talk- Morton enters on foot- sees Nell- astonished- comes down- speaks- angry- John does not reply- Morton threatens with cane- Nell checks him- he bundles her into car- car off.

That's not one-tenth of what you wanted to say about the scene, and it's not half what you think that you positively must say, perhaps, but it is all you need to say for you have told the whole scene in four type-written lines. You have told the director all he needs to know and that is enough.

The director knows how a man and woman in love with each other will act and he knows how a cranky old father will act. You tell him that these are the three people and they do certain things. You leave *how* they do it to the director, telling only *what* is done.

You see but one period used, and that at the end of the scene. Dashes are used elsewhere. There are two reasons for this. One is that you do not have to stop and consider punctuation and the other is that by using a dash instead of a punctuation mark, you can clip off a lot of unimportant words. You are not trying to write fluent phrase. You are trying to tell a story as briefly as possible and the dash not only saves a lot of connecting words, but it chops the sentence up into each action. If you will study that scene closely you will see that each dash follows some definite action. Morton enters on foot. That is one action. He sees Nell. He comes down. He speaks to Nell. He grows angry. Each division is a distinct action.

It will seem difficult at first to write with such extreme brevity and it may be some little time before you can write so tersely and get everything in, but it will come with practise and after a time you will find it very easy. At the start, for the sake of practice, let the action run as it will and then see how much you can cut it down without taking out a single explanation.

You will feel that you should have told how John kissed Nell and how they held hands until she gently withdrew hers. You will think that "lovers' greetings" is far too little to get down the pretty little love scene you have in mind, but you'll find that the director knows what lovers' greetings are, and if he doesn't get your love scene he will have one as good and perhaps better. There is one thing you do not know and he does. He knows precisely what the players of Nell and John can do and he will give them stuff that they can play. You might have had a five foot heroine in mind, a kittenish, cuddlesome little thing. His leading woman may be five feet seven and that's seven inches too tall to be cuddlesome. Your business, if written in full, would have been absurd. If you had written this so that it had to be played by a five foot soubrette, you would not have sold it to a director with a five foot seven woman lead, but by leaving it more or less impersonal you appeal to either.

At the same time, if you have a scene that needs ten lines or twenty or fifty to get the idea over, use the space. The measure

of a play is the time the action runs, not the number of words.

Remember, too, that it is not the number of scenes you write, but the length of time they run.

But let's write some more. You have two choices for your second scene. You can follow John or you can follow Nell. Figure out which is the more important. The next big bit of business is that Nell writes John that she will marry him and no one else. That means that we must follow Nell. If we had planned to follow John we should have had John walk off the first scene so that we would be prepared to see him come into the second, but we shall not need John for a moment so we leave him standing in scene one and follow Nell to her home.

We might show the next scene with Nell coming into the library of her home, but we are going to use the front of the house anyway a little later and we might as well show that she gets home. It will make the action a little smoother, so we write:

- 2- Exterior Nell's home- Nell and Morton enter in car- leave car- exit into house.
- 3- Library- Nell and Morton enter- Morton angry- Nell defiant- Morton exits- Nell to desk- writes.

On screen- note

Dear John,

No matter what father says, I'll marry no one but you.  
Lovingly,

NELL.

Back to scene- Nell calls maid- gives letter- Maid exits- Nell cries.

You will notice that the "On screen" is written in the margin, the same as the figures and presently you will see the leaders done in the same way. This is to make certain that these are not overlooked, both in the making of the picture and when they are written off to be sent to the leader room to be made. You will note, too, that while the scenes are single spaced, a double space is used between scenes and between parts of scenes and inserts or leaders.

A bust is not brought out into the margin because it is a scene itself, even though it is inserted into some larger scene of which it is a magnified section.

Note, too, that John and Nell are called by their first names, and her father by his last. As a rule, young people are called by their first names and their elders by their last. It suggests a

difference to the director in reading. In the same way it is well to select short, easily remembered names. If your Spanish heroine was christened Juanita, shorten it to Nita for the sake of brevity and pronunciation. Use the shorter names for leading characters and the longer ones for the minor players. Call your hero Steve, but your villain Stephen, because you are not as friendly with the villain.

Now that the note is written John should get it. He might receive it at the house or on the street. It is better to have the maid meet him coming out of the house, because that saves showing the front when she arrives and then his room. We cut out one scene and yet get a better effect. The real art of practical photoplay writing lies in looking out for these little things. We have the scene:

4- Front of John's home- John enters from house- Maid enters- gives note- John reads-

On screen- flash of note from No. 3-

Back to scene- John kisses note- puts in pocket- exits up street.

In scene two we had Nell exit into the house and now we have John entering from the house. This rather upsets our notions. We thought people entered a house or made their exit from it. But we are speaking now of the scene. John enters the scene by making his exit from the house. Nell makes her exit from the scene by entering her home.

There is no real need of flashing the note in this scene, since it is the only note yet used, but it only takes about three feet and there is a sort of definite identification that is worth those three feet. It is best always to show what is written at the time it is written and what is read at the moment that it is read.

These four scenes complete the introduction. We know John, Nell and her father, their homes, their circumstances, their names and the position in which they find themselves. Now we are ready to go on with the story. All of this happened in one day, but now there is a jump. We cannot show John in the park without explanation unless we would have it thought that he went from scene four straight to the park, so we proceed the next scene with a leader.

Leader- Several weeks later. An accidental meeting.

5- Park- As in No. 5- Nell loitering along walk- John enters- sees her- surprised- pleased- comes forward- greetings- they walk slowly toward camera- exit.

- 6- Another part of park- John and Nell walk slowly through- as they exit Morton enters on cross path- sees them- exits after them.
- 7- Entrance to park- Nell's auto waiting- Nell and John enter from park- stand talking- Morton hurries up- about to strike John with cane- Nell cries warning- John catches cane- breaks it across his knee- throws pieces on ground- Morton raves- John raises hat to Nell- exits.

Leader- The young inventor meets success.

- 8: Workshop- auto with bonnet removed- rear wheels on home trainer-John enters- removes coat-bends over motor.
- 9- Nell's home, as in No. 2- Nell and Morton enter in car- alight- Morton sees other car coming- points- waits- other car enters- Count alights- Morton greets effusively- introduces Nell- Nell cold- all enter house.
- 10- Workshop as in No. 8- John still working- handles levers- engine starts- works- John delighted- looks up- vision in corner- John and Nell before minister- vision fades- John picks up coat- hurries out.
- 11- Library as in No. 3- Nell, Morton and Count on- Count taking leave- very impressive in manner- Nell still cold- Count exits- Morton turns on Nell- furious- speaks-

Cut-in leader- "That is the man you will marry. You will be a countess."

Back to scene- Nell defiant- Morton storms out.

Now the story has been advanced another stage. We have shown that it is through his invention that John hopes to be able to marry Nell. We also show the Count, indicate Morton's desire, show John's success and Nell's defiance of her father. By running the shop scenes alternately with the ones showing Nell, we do not have to stay too long in any one scene and yet avoid the use of leader.

If we had shown Morton in No. 5 it would have seemed as though he was spying on Nell, but since he chances on them as they walk along, it is apparent that he was not watching. If we had shown John come into the shop and at once perfect the invention the effect would have been absurd, but by going to the Mortons' house for a moment and then coming back to find John successful, we have advanced the story through the introduction of the Count and at the same time have given John time to succeed.

## TECHNIQUE OF THE PHOToplay

The vision tells John's first thought. The cut-in leader could have been run before scene eleven without loss of interest, but if it had been run between scenes there might have existed some doubt as to whether the words were spoken before or after the Count's departure. It is not a good plan to cut in a leader unless it is necessary, as a leader interrupts the action and causes a momentary check in the interest, but there are times when a cut in leader is more or less necessary.

Now we come to a third period. John recognizes the Count as a former chauffeur. He determines to keep watch. He also sells his invention.

Leader- Some days later. John recognises the Count as a chauffeur.

12- Street- Morton, Nell and Count coming toward camera- John enters from camera- raises hat- Nell and Count respond- Morton looks straight ahead- they exit- John looks after them- puzzled- thinks- dissolve in auto at curb- chauffeur bending over machine- straightens up- shows face- it is the Count- dissolve out- John smiles- exits up street.

13- Business office- Bascom at desk- John ushered in- Bascom cordial- shows John paper- John reads-

On screen-part of assignment

for which the parties of the first part agree to pay the party of the second part \$50,000 on assignment of patent rights and a royalty of \$25 on every machine so equipped.

Back to scene- John nods- lawyer enters- Bascom says John will sign- John signs papers- shakes hands- exits.

Because we did not see John and the Count while the latter was a chauffeur, we use a leader to explain the recognition and then dissolve in the Count as he was then. This makes the leader more plain and drives home the fact. No leader is used to explain the sale of the patent because that fact is covered by the section of the assignment. A leader in explanation would seem too long, but while the insert is longer and stays longer on the screen, it seems a part of the scene and not an intrusive leader, and so it is less objectionable.

Now the middle action starts. The chauffeur-Count is moved to the front for a moment.

Leader- That evening-

14- Library as in No. 3- Count, Nell and others on- small dinner party- all exit except Count and Morton- Count

speaks- Morton takes key from pocket- opens safe set in wall- displays jewels- Count admires- jewels returned- Morton about to lock safe- Count jostles Morton- show that it is done on purpose- key drops- Morton stoops- Count is quicker- gets key.

15- Bust of Count's hands making impression of key in wax.

16- Back to No. 14- Count completes action by rising- hands key to Morton with apology- they exit.

It will be noticed that scene fourteen gives the library "as in No. 3," but that scene sixteen is "back to No. 14." This is because there are other scenes between fourteen and eleven, the last previous library scene, and the time is later. In scene sixteen there is only the slight change from the end of fourteen, covered by the making of the wax impression, so that the scene is practically the same. We go back to the scene as it was in the end of fourteen and resume the interrupted action.

"Back to," is used where the action is but slightly interrupted. "Same as," is used where the setting is the same, but the scene opens with different action. In that case reference is made to the scene number *first* used. Seventeen is the same as sixteen except that time has passed and now instead of the stage being bare as at the end of sixteen, Nell and the Count are discovered. If we went "Back to" sixteen we would go back to a bare stage.

Leader- For her refusal to marry the Count Nell is sent to the country.

17- Library as in No. 3- Count and Nell on- Count proposes- Nell refuses- he tries to force engagement ring on finger- she resists- Morton enters- sides with Count- Nell rushes from room- Morton apologizes to Count- assures him it will be all right.

18- John's workshop as in No. 8- John and Bascom on- they enter car- John starts car- they exit in car.

Leader- The speed device is a success.

19- Speedway or country road- John and Bascom enter in car- Bascom holds watch- gives the word- John speeds car-

20- Further along- John and Bascom pass through in car- slow turning to give speed.

21- End of speedway or roadside- group of men waiting- car seen in distance- approaches rapidly- shows- stops at group- Bascom joins group- shows watch- all congratulate John- he thanks them- turns- exits.

- 22- Workshop as in No. 8- John enters alone in car- closes door- starts to attend to car- man enters- gives note- John reads-

On screen- Note

Because I would not marry the Count, father is sending me to Uncle George's place in the country, with the house keeper for a watchman- I will write soon- don't be discouraged.

NELL.

Back to scene- John shocked- comes to sudden determination- puts on coat- exits.

Leader- John goes to warn Morton.

23- Street- John passes through.

24- Close up of Morton's steps- John enters- rings bell- servant comes- takes John's card- exits, closing door- John shows surprise at being left on steps.

25- Library as in No. 3- Morton and Count on- talking- servant enters with card- gives Morton- Morton angry- exits- Count rises as door closes- goes to safe.

26- Back to No. 24- Morton enters- starts to row with John- John speaks- Morton refuses to believe.

27- Back to No. 25- Count has opened safe- stuffs jewels in pocket.

28- Back to No. 26- John still arguing- Morton enters house- John follows.

29- Back to No. 27- Count closing safe- hears noise- alarmed- tries to lock safe- Morton and John enter- Count tries to appear unconcerned- John goes to safe- opens- they seize Count- take jewels from him- John goes to telephone- Morton tells him not to send for the police- Count exits- has nerve back- Morton thanks John.

All through these later scenes "Back to" is used since the dual action is continuous, but while this is a cut-back it is not the cut-back as it is generally understood, though it is the same as a cut-back in the way it is handled. The dual action is employed here to cover up the actual robbery and get the story past the Board of Censors, though if they passed the wax impression of the key they would probably pass this. The commission of any crime or offensive act can be covered up in this fashion. We are coming presently to the true cut-back.

Leader- The Count plans revenge.

- 30- Street- Auto at curb- Jenkins beside machine- Count enters- Jenkins recognizes him- they talk- Count makes proposal- Jenkins assents- Count enters car- Jenkins about to follow- Count kicks him in chest- Jenkins falls- Count speeds out of scene- John enters- helps Jenkins up- Jenkins explains- John startled- writes in notebook.

On screen- Page from memo book-

This man tells me that the Count has gone to abduct Nell for ransom. I am going to her help. Hurry after.

Back to scene- John gives Jenkins note- Jenkins starts in one direction- John runs in the other.

- 31- Workshop as in No. 8- John rushes in- hustles out in car.

- 32- Lawn of country house- Nell reading- old woman watching.

- 33- Road- Count passes through in car.

- 34- City street- John passes through in car.

- 35- Lawn as in No. 31- Nell on- looks up in surprise- Count enters- speaks.

- 36- Country road- John passes through in car.

Leader- "Your father is ill. He sends for you."

- 37- Back to No. 35- Count speaks leader- Nell shows distress- hurries from scene with Count-old woman follows.

- 38- Entrance to country estate- car waiting- Count and Nell hurry in- Count helps Nell in car- follows- exits as old woman hurries into scene- she calls after them- no response.

- 39- Road- Count and Nell race through.

- 40- Nell's house as in No. 2- Morton enters from house- Jenkins enters- gives Morton note- Morton reads.

On screen- Flash of note from No. 30.

Back to scene- Morton gives Jenkins tip- hurries into car- exits in car.

- 41- Entrance as in No. 38- Woman still on- John enters in car- speaks- woman points direction Count took- John exits.

- 42- Road- Count and Nell pass through- Count looking back.

- 43- Road as in No. 38- John passes through scene.

- 44- Road- Count and Nell pass through.

- 45- Road as in No. 33- Morton passes through in car.
- 46- Crossroads- Count and Nell enter in car- Count takes right hand road- Nell tosses out glove- make action as marked as possible.
- 47- Road- John passes through.
- 48- Crossroads as in No. 46- John enters- slows down- does not know which road- sees glove- recognizes it- kisses it- starts down right hand road.
- 49- Road- Count and Nell enter- Nell struggling with Count for steering wheel- car swerves.
- 50- Road- John runs through.
- 51- Back to No. 48, but car now overturned- Nell and Count in road unconscious beside car- John enters- stops- runs to Nell- works over her.
- 52- Entrance as in No. 38- Morton enters- woman runs through gate- tells Morton- points- Morton starts ahead.
- 53- Back to No. 51- Nell revives- they give attention to Count- he is dead- John covers his face with spare auto duster- hear car coming- Morton enters in car- comes to them- thanks John- all enter John's car, leaving Morton's chauffeur with Count- exit.

This is rather a crude example of the cut-back, but it serves to show how the scenes are laid out to hold the suspense. It also makes possible that overturned automobile. As the car swerves it is stopped. After it is overturned scene fifty-one is made and then the last scene.

That last scene closes the story rather abruptly, but it is better to stop right there. We see that John gets the girl and there our interest dies. It would be possible to go on and show the marriage, but it would be just as possible and just as logical to keep on and show that they had children and grandchildren, that they lived to a ripe old age, then died and were buried.

This is the story of how John won Nell. As soon as he wins her stop, for the interest dies. There is art in knowing just when the story starts, but to know just when to stop and not stop a scene too soon or two scenes too late is a far greater accomplishment.

Before we drop the story note that while we early find that the Count really is Jim Laroque, a thieving chauffeur, we keep on calling him the Count. Have just one name for a character and always use that name.

## CHAPTER VII.

## LEADERS AND INSERTED MATTER

The importance of careful work—leaders vs. letters—telegrams—newspaper headlines—the pictorial insert—need for variety—“leaderless” script.

One of the most marked signs of the novice is the awkward handling of leaders and inserts.

It has been repeatedly stated that the ideal script is one that is entirely free from leader, and this is quite true. Leader interrupts the action and for a moment halts the interest in the picture while the brain assimilates the information just conveyed. In the theater the curtain falls and interrupts the action. When it rises again there are a few minutes in which the effort is wholly directed to “getting the audience back.” The leader is the drop curtain of the photoplay and, whether it is used as a curtain or not, there is a certain check in the interest, a momentary lapse of attention. Therefore the ideal script is one in which no leader is needed to explain the story.

But it is well to remember that there is a vast difference between the script that needs no leaders and the script that merely lacks them. Better a leader before each scene and an understandable story, than the leaderless script and a meaningless and therefore uninteresting jumble of confused action. The real leaderless script would be one in which the action all passed within a few hours, escaping the need of time leaders, and in which the story was so simple as not to need printed explanation. Do not, at the start, try for the leaderless script. Try, instead, to use as few leaders as possible and to have these as clear and as concise as you can get them.

Another statement, wholly correct but sadly misapplied, is that a letter is less apt to be resented than a leader. This is very true. A thirty word letter is less apt to be resented by an audience than a fifteen word leader, because a letter seems a part of the action and not an intrusion, but this should not be taken to mean that every time you need to explain something a character should sit down and drop a line to someone else. You can escape a leader with a letter now and then, but do not try to do so habitually. Use the letter or other insert *only* where it is clearly indicated and the leader where you must.

Another point to remember is that when you are rushing toward your climax the movement of your action should be as rapid as possible and so all explanatory leaders should be used in the earlier scenes, straightening out the situations so that when you come to your climax you do not have to pause every scene or two and make a labored explanation. Keep the last third of your action as free as possible from any sort of insert, but *use an insert if you have to* instead of passing over the scene that is not clear.

The leader should be as brief as is possible. It should be clipped of all unnecessary words, but at the same time you should not trim too much. Be brief, but be fluent. The leader that reads easily is better than the shorter sentence that is abrupt and rough. Don't take the first thing that comes into your mind. Work over and polish the phrase until it is both terse and elegant.

Suppose that you have a leader that first comes to you as "Frank and Jim have a quarrel over May Morgan."

In the first place you do not need the last word. May is as good as the full name for our purpose. The word "have" is more or less useless. "Frank and Jim quarrel about May," cuts it down to six words. But we can see that Frank and Jim are the disputants. "The quarrel over May" is all you need. You can see that it is a quarrel, for that matter, but "over May" is not smooth, so the other words are kept to make for ease of speech. The four words tell the story, but by using quotation marks and letting Jim speak, the words "Let May alone," will be ample to explain the situation.

Perhaps you have something like "Bess refuses Count Casimir's proposal of marriage, telling him that she will give her heart only to an American."

You know Bess and the Count. You see that he proposes and is refused. The only point to be explained is that Bess wants an American. Again use the quotation marks and "I will marry only an American" tells the whole story. If you want to keep the audience guessing until the last moment you can use it as a cut-in leader, or you can run it before the scene if you do not want to hold back the fact.

The quoted leader is handy, but it should not be used too much, and there is a growing tendency to use two and even three cut-in leaders in one scene. A straight leader and one cut-in is about the limit. A leader or a cut-in, but not both, should suffice.

There was a time when the comedy leader was cut out on the ground that it was not needed, but now most Editors will pass a leader if it gives a laugh. Surely a five foot leader with a

laugh is as well worth while as a thirty foot scene with one laugh, provided that the laugh leader is not used more than twice and preferably only once in a half reel comedy.

It is good practise for both beginner and the advanced student to spend spare moments in taking ten and twelve word leaders and reducing them to four or five words.

But the leader can also be used to "break" scenes as where a day or a week or a year elapses between two scenes, possibly both played in the same setting. Here the leader is a drop curtain and "The next day" is as effective a break as the curtain would be. In using time leaders try and get a variety of phrases. Do not say "The next day" three or four times in the same script. Use "The next day," the first time and then "In the morning" or "The following night," or whatever it may be. "The next week," "A few days later." "As time goes on," "With the passing days" and similar expressions will greatly aid in varying the monotony.

The time leader can be used to break scenes, but it is better, where possible, to break with another scene if the time is short. Taking scenes eight and ten in the script in chapter six, we might play them as eight and nine by writing in a leader. "A few hours later. John completes his invention," but since we can use the scene with Nell and her father, which is all action, it is much better.

In the same way you must break scenes where the action cannot long continue without growing tiresome. The heroine goes to her room to change her dress. We cannot remain and watch her, yet the action cannot continue until the change has been made. She starts to change, we cut to the hero waiting for her, come back to see her ready dressed, and the action goes on. As a leader we might say "Nell changes her dress," but the cut-back is better. It is a matter of judgment when to use a leader and when to cut-back to cover.

Letters and telegrams are largely used, the telegram being used where possible because of the brevity due to the cost per word. Common sense must tell the author when to use a letter and when a telegram may be substituted.

If the letter is to be used, it is often better to use a paragraph from a letter than the entire letter. No girl, for instance, would write:

Dear Jane:

The wealthy John Smith will visit your town next week.  
Lovingly,  
**SADIE**

That would be absurd, but no more absurd than some of the letters we actually see on the screen. This would look much better:

so do hurry up and write.

Lovingly,  
SADIE

P. S.—The rich John Smith will visit Hampton next week. He's a great catch, but a wary fish.

That gives the whole point without suggesting that it is more than a casual mention.

In telegrams it is not necessary to give the markings, but it is necessary to give the address and the signature. You do not write:

On screen- Telegram-

Come at once. Your mother is dead.

Give the complete form all ready to be transcribed and save the director the trouble of thinking up a name and address. Write it:

On screen- Telegram-

HENRY HARRISON,  
1193 Fourth Avenue,  
New York City.

Come at once. Your mother died last night.

FATHER.

Now all the director has to do is to copy this off onto the leader sheet and send it to that department.

In forming your addresses do not use an actual address. There is no number so high as 1193 in Fourth Avenue, New York City, which is why it is used. If you want an address on Fifth Avenue take the number of the Public Library. For a downtown address on Broadway Trinity Church or St. Paul's Chapel would be better than some live number. The same applies to other cities.

Newspaper paragraphs or extracts from books serve their purpose well. For an extract from a book simply give sufficient of the text. For a newspaper paragraph copy the style of some paper.

The headline is easier than the paragraph, but you cannot headline a paragraph or paragraph a two column story. In any case give the full text instead of writing:

On screen- Newspaper paragraph telling that John has been ordered to report for sea duty.

Do the work yourself and get it just right. Put it more like this.

On screen- Newspaper clipping.

Lieutenant John Bergen, U.S.N., who has been spending his shore leave with his parents in this city, left last night to rejoin his ship, which leaves the Brooklyn Navy Yard this morning.

The paragraph does nicely for facts of no great news interest, but the headline should be used for the big events. If your hero's father is plain John Brown, his death would be announced in three lines in the death notices, but if he was John Fleming, head of the Mousetrap Trust, his death would be "played up" more like this:

On screen- Two column head-

Millionaire John Fleming

Discovered Dead in His Bed

Powerful head of industrial trust dies in solitude in his palatial home.

Quarrel with His Daughter Recalled

Marriage of his only child to her riding instructor believed to have hastened magnate's death.

This will be set up precisely like a news head and when it is thrown on the screen enough will be shown to advise the audience that when Mary picks the paper up she reads of her father's death. Only that fact is essential, but give the whole of the head, for the first two lines will not fill the frame and you must give a little more than enough to fill a space one-third wider than it is high. The frame is one inch by three-quarters and the head must be proportioned to the space. If you cannot write your head offhand, select some headline in a daily paper that will suit and copy the style.

Legal papers and similar instruments can be shown as the paragraph in the preceding chapter or only the back endorsed with the facts may be shown. If you want to show that it is John's life insurance papers, you show a hand clutching the paper, the writing on the back shows what it is.

For pictorial inserts such as lockets, you describe the article with sufficient fullness, but do not give unnecessary details. You do not, for example, say that the locket is a gold locket set with diamonds and with a monogram on the back when you do not show the back at all, but merely the inside with Jack's picture. Instead you write:

On screen- Locket showing Jack's picture.

If you need a certain shape of locket, such as an oval, a heart or a circle, you say so, but do not say the locket must be an inch and a half long when you show only the locket. If a hand holds the locket it must be to scale, but if the locket alone is shown, the property man may take a large picture of the player and mould a plaster locket around an eight by ten print. It will photograph better and come out better on the screen.

Do not be too fussy about your inserts, and do not draw a lot of designs. Indicate clearly what you want and leave the rest to the director. He will do his best. Do not send photographs, drawings or other things that may be needed. If you call for something that the studio cannot possibly get, make a note to the effect that you can supply the article free on request.

Not long ago a verse from the Koran was wanted in a script and the author offered to send a copy for reproduction, giving at the same time the verse and sura of the text in his script. What he got on the screen was a page from an Arabic Koran followed by the translation, a much more effective insert than he had thought to suggest. The director, as a rule, is more anxious than you to give a good production. If he is not, your over-anxiety will not help, anyway.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### A STUDY OF THE SYNOPSIS

The vital importance of the synopsis—the great appeal to the editor—the opportunity for literary style—how to condense and retain the story.

In Chapter V a part of the space was given to the synopsis and its function, since the synopsis is a part of the photoplay form, but the importance of this division of the photoplay warrants more careful and exhaustive treatment than can be given in part of a chapter.

The synopsis, as has been said, is the means of attracting the attention of the Editor. It is the synopsis, as a rule, that sells the story or is the cause of failure. If the synopsis is snappy and attractive, it will catch the Editor's attention. If it is dull and sluggish it is not likely to interest him. It may partly tell a story that does get his attention, and he may read the plot of action for the complete narrative, but he will not turn to the action already half convinced that this is the story that he wants. He will be

hopeful, perhaps, but it will be with no assurance that he turns the pages over. He is apt to argue that the person who cannot write a good synopsis cannot write a good plot of action. This may not be the fact, but it is so generally true that the exceptions do not count.

A man may be able to cut a tremendous gash in a tree with a single stroke of the axe and yet have his strength fail him before the tree is felled or lack the skill to properly direct his strokes, but as a rule the man who makes the best single cut is the one most likely to be able to chop down the tree with the greatest skill and in the shortest time.

So it is with the synopsis. The Editor is apt to argue that if the synopsis is good the story must be good, but that the dull synopsis advertises the poor story.

The fact that the story must be held to 250 words seems to cause beginners much trouble and it sometimes happens that in worrying about the length they fail to do their best in telling the story. It is better to overwrite and then cut down than to try and write to the limit the first time. Later on you will catch the trick and be able to get two or three reels into 250 words, but until you reach this point, do not be afraid to waste several sheets of trial paper getting the synopsis just right.

To study the work of making the synopsis, suppose we take the Lubin story of From Ignorance to Light. Here is the manuscript of the story as it was written with the original title.

#### FOR THE WRONG MAN'S SAKE.

##### Action.

- 1- Atmospheric picture- characteristic spot- Mary, with bare feet, in a skimpy calico gown, leans against a tree- Paul and a couple of other men pass- Paul raises his hat with exaggerated courtesy- make it plain that he does not know the girl- he passes on- Mary looks after him- Jack comes from the direction in which Paul and the others made exit he speaks courteously- Mary responds, but her interest is in Paul, and as she speaks she glances after him- Jack passes on- Mary does not look after him, but turns her back on direction he took to watch Paul.

Leader- A few days later. The visitor decides to amuse himself with the country girl.

- 2- Location- Mary on- loafing in the sun- she sits up as Paul and others approach- Paul stops- she is embarrassed but eager to gain his attention- Paul stops- chats a moment- the others urge him to come on- he tells them to

go without him- they exit- he suggests a stroll- Mary, all eagerness, springs up- exits down path diagonal to camera- Jack comes in- sees them- stands watching a moment- shakes his head a moment- registers his concern- passes on.

- 3- Location- Paul and Mary stroll in- Mary completely absorbed in Paul- she pauses- points off- Paul glances at watch- shakes head- tries to detain her- she refuses- starts to run off- he catches her- brings her back- wants a kiss- she refuses- he urges- steals one- she is angry and yet glad- goes slowly out of scene- he looks after her- laughs- exits in opposite direction.

Leader- The next day.

- 4- Same as No. 3- Mary on- watching- impatient- looks off right and left- Paul steals in from rear- puts hands over her eyes- she guesses who it is- he claims kiss- she gives it to him, shyly- they exit out of picture.

Leader- And the next.

- 5- Same as No. 2- Mary watching- Paul enters- they start to exit- Jack enters- speaks- Mary gives him a happy little smile- immediately engrossed with Paul- passes out of scene- Jack clenches hands- looks after them- regains control of himself- passes on.
- 6- Spot- Paul and Mary stroll in- Paul takes book from pocket- offers it to Mary- she is embarrassed- shakes head- he does not understand- persists in offering it- she hangs head- speaks:

Cut in leader- "I can't read."

Back to scene- Paul surprised- Mary perceives his astonishment- begins to cry- he pets her- coaxes her- smiles- they exit slowly.

- 7- Location as in No. 3- Paul and Mary enter- Paul kisses her- she exits- he looks after her a moment- laughs- Gertrude enters- greetings- they exit together- Mary returns into scene- looks after them- jealous- steals after them.
- 8- Location- Paul and Gertrude enter- sit- chat- Mary steals into background- Paul takes book from pocket- offers it to Gertrude- she takes- looks it over- Paul tells of Mary- Mary shows she is subject of conversation- steals off.

Leader- The Awakening- "Make me educated- like her."

- 9- Spot showing No. 8 in background- Jack enters- Mary

comes stumbling through the brush- crying- Jack stops her- she speaks leader- points to Gertrude and Paul- Jack understands- leads her off.

Leader- The schoolmaster educates Mary for his rival's sake.

- 10- Jack's home- neat cottage- table and bench in yard- he and Mary come in- she is more like a child with Jack- he gives her book and slate- they sit- she takes first lesson.
- 11- Same as No. 8- Paul and Gertrude rise- he tries to make love- she stops him- they exit.

Leader- The next day.

- 12- Location as in No. 2- Paul comes in- looks about him- tucks envelope to tree with a pin- glances at watch- exits.
- 13- Spot as in No. 6- Paul passes through scene- overtakes Gertrude- they exit together.
- 14- Location as in No. 2- Mary comes running in- late- looks about- worried- sees letter- opens- shakes head- cannot read- runs off.
- 15- Jack's home, as in No. 10- Jack on- Mary comes in with her letter- offers Jack the opened sheet- he reads:

On screen- letter.

"Sorry I could not wait, but I am hurrying home. I will see you next year." PAUL."

Back to scene- Mary cries- Jack comforts her.

Leader- As the days go by.

- 16- Location as in No. 2- Mary studying book- hard work- Jack enters- sits beside her- all eagerness, she snuggles up beside him to explain her difficulties- looks down at bare feet- realizes for the first time that they ARE bare- raises one and inspects it critically- speaks- Jack nods- offers money- Mary shakes head- has idea- runs off.
- 17- Mary's home- not as good as Jack's- Mary comes in- mother working embroidery- Mary begs her to teach her- mother surprised- starts to teach- Mary very much interested.
- 18- Back to No. 16- Jack rouses out of brown study- picks up book that Mary dropped- kisses it- shows mental unrest- rises- exits.
- 19- Back to No. 17- Mary hard at work- Jack enters- gives her book- she thanks him- speaks:

Cut in leader- "When Paul comes back I can read and write and dress like other girls."

- 20- Back to scene- Mary happy in the thought- it hurts Jack, but he hides his emotion- exits.

Leader- Three months later.

- 21- Jack's home- Jack on- at table- Mary enters- now trimly dressed, with shoes and stockings- carries books- sits- starts to study with Jack- not so free in her manner with him- there is a certain reserve- little girl not too young (about 12) enters- gives Jack letter- he thanks her- she puts up her face for a kiss- he kisses her carelessly- Mary half rises- angry- child exits- Jack turns- surprised- Mary controls herself- they continue studies- Mary can't work- shakes head- registers that she has headache- rises- says good bye- Jack takes her hand- pats it encouragingly- she snatches it away- runs from scene- Jack surprised- follows slowly.
- 22- Location as in No. 8- Mary comes in- all upset- sits- thinks hard- Jack comes into background- advances slowly- speaks- wants to know what the matter is- Mary hangs head- Jack urges- puts arms about her in a brotherly sort of way- Mary snatches back- then comes slowly into his arms again- hides face a moment- speaks:

Cut in leader- "Can't you see! It's you- not him."

Back to scene- Jack sees.

We'll overlook the fact that it is a very bad plan to have a cut in leader in the last scene and discuss the synopsis.

This play was written for George O. Nicholls, a personal friend, and the synopsis was rather more brief than is altogether advisable in usual practice, but at the same time it told all of the story. It read:

Mary Monson, a country girl, is attracted by Paul Langford, who is spending his winter in the South. For his sake she learns to read and write and is willing to work to earn money for proper clothes. The educational side is looked after by Jack Hardy, the schoolmaster, who himself loves Mary. He thinks he is educating her to make her fit to marry his rival, but Mary suddenly discovers that the right man is Jack.

This runs but sixty-seven words, yet the full story is told and many editors would buy a story on that synopsis even if they did not know the author who wrote it.

But suppose that this had been written by a beginner who labored under the belief that everything must be put down. He might start it off this way:

Mary Monson is a country girl. One day Paul Langford passes her and is attracted by her beauty. The schoolmaster passes and speaks to her, but she has eyes only for Paul. The next day they meet again and this time Paul asks her to take a walk with him. She does so. They walk through the woods until Mary discovers that it is time for her to go home. Paul wants her to kiss him good bye. She says no, but Paul runs after her and brings her back and kisses her. Next day they meet again and this time she does not mind being kissed. They go for another walk and pass Jack the schoolmaster, who also loves Mary. He is very angry when he sees them together, but he does not say anything. Paul offers Mary a book to read. Mary does not know how to read and she is very much ashamed when she has to tell him so. She starts to go home and Gertrude, a beautiful young lady, who is a friend of Paul's comes along and she and Paul go for a walk. Mary is jealous and follows them. Paul gives Gertrude the book that Mary could not read and tells her how Mary could not read it. Gertrude reads the book. Mary runs away and meets the schoolmaster, Jack, and asks him to teach her how to read like Gertrude can. Jack says he will so he takes her to his home where he gives her a slate and a book and she begins to study. The next day Mary is late meeting Paul and he leaves her a note saying that he is going away and will see her next year. Mary cannot read the note, of course, so she takes it to the schoolmaster, who reads it for her. She studies very hard and learns how to read and write. She also discovers that she has no shoes and stockings so she learns how to do embroidery so as to get the money for shoes and stockings, which she does. Then she finds that she loves Jack instead of Paul so she tells him so and he hugs and kisses her.

This may sound amusing, but it is precisely the sort of synopsis that comes into the studio day after day. All of this detail does not interest the Editor. The point of the story is that big hearted Jack, for the sake of the woman he loves, sets aside his own longing and tries to fit her to be the wife of another. That is about all there is to the story, in its last analysis. There is plenty of action, but the essential plot is contained in that single sentence, "He thinks that he is educating her to make her fit to

marry his rival, but Mary suddenly discovers that the right man is Jack." Writing for the stranger editor, that fact should be the first advanced. That is the punch, the education of the girl for the sake of her happiness though the act makes it possible for her to marry the other man. Start your synopsis with that.

All the time thinking that he is fitting her to marry his rival, Jack Hardy teaches Mary Monson to read and write, setting aside his own hopes of happiness for the sake of hers.

That is an interesting proposition and commands the editorial attention. To employ a current phrase, "You've got him going." You have interested him and he will read the synopsis with the idea that it is what he wants, and he is only reading to make certain. Now that you have the story advanced, give some of the detail.

Paul Langford is wintering in the south. He chances upon Mary, whose comely face wins his passing interest. (Her open admiration renders an introduction unnecessary and) Paul finds her simple charm attractive. He is surprised to learn that she cannot read when he offers to loan her the novel he is reading, and when Mary sees him give the book to a woman guest of the hotel, she turns to Jack and begs that he will teach her to read and write that she may be fit to marry Paul. Jack assents. Paul is called away (but promises to return the following year and), Mary turns diligently to her studies that she may be prepared for his coming. (Growing education brings to her a sense of the unfitness of her dress and for the first time she evinces an interest in sewing, making embroidery that she may gain money for clothes.) The intimacy with the schoolteacher insensibly brings a change of heart. Mary does not realize it until one day she sees him kiss a little girl, one of his pupils. It is only a child, but jealousy flames in her heart and for the first time she realizes that it is Jack whom she loves. She rushes from the scene. Jack, following more slowly, seeks to know the cause of her agitation and against his shoulder she breathes the soft confession that it is he whom she loves. The sadness of the past few months is wiped out in the joy of that knowledge.

That is 289 words. By eliminating the words in parenthesis marks the synopsis is reduced to 250 words. A little study will show that these are the words least essential to the story. The fact that she gets new clothes is not as important as the discovery of her love through the kisses given the child, but were it desired to cut still further, the description of that scene could be dropped with no great harm.

Let your story run as full as you will, using only the more important action and ignoring completely the run of the scenes.

Count your words and find out how much you must eliminate. Now go over your rough draft carefully and see what you can best spare. Lightly underscore with a pencil the passages that are not necessary. Now count the number of words in these passages. If you have taken out enough, cross them off, close up the breaks and clean copy. If you have marked too much, leave some of it in if it really interests, but remember that the Editor wants to know what the story is *about* rather than precisely what each scene contains. If he wishes the latter information he will turn to the plot of action.

It is not absolutely necessary that you tell your synopsis with literary skill, but if you are able to write, this is the one place in your script where fine writing is not only permissible but desirable. You cannot do very much fine writing in 250 words, but you can work over and polish your phrases until you have succeeded in getting something that is almost like a prose poem. Even if you cannot write in polished phrase you can and should acquire a reasonably fluent style. Do not chop the story up into four and five word sentences nor on the other hand use too involved a phrase. Both are bad. Do not, for example, say:

Jack loves Mary. Mary loves Paul. Paul is amusing himself with Mary. She asks Jack to teach her to write. He does so. He thinks she is going to marry Paul. When he is done teaching he finds he's the man.

That is bad, but no worse than this:

Jack, a young country schoolmaster, loves Mary, a simple country maiden, but Mary, in her turn, loves Paul, a visitor from the North, though Paul does not love Mary, but merely seeks to win her love, that he may amuse himself, because he really intends to marry Gertrude, who has come south with her mother and is also a guest at the hotel where Paul is stopping, though Mary does not know this and Jack is equally ignorant of the fact.

If you find that you have trouble in expressing yourself, forget that you are writing a story. Pretend that you are writing Tom Jones a letter telling him about the story you have just done. You want to tell him in a few words what the plot of the story is. Go ahead and do it, then discard the letter part and you will have a synopsis. Sometimes the beginner is frightened out of his expression by the thought that he must write a story; like an English barmaid who could pour a little vermouth into a glass of gin and bitters, but who could not do it properly after she was told that she had mixed a martini cocktail. Just write the letter and then take out the part you want.

Don't be afraid to waste time in getting your synopsis just right. Nine-tenths of your sale will be made on your synopsis and

sometimes on just a line or two from that synopsis. You may not be able to write as well as you might wish, but there is absolutely nothing to prevent you from getting into the synopsis the strong point of your story. You will get more money if your story is properly divided into scenes, but if your synopsis shows a really strong and original idea, and that idea is suitable for use by the company to which it is submitted, a sale will follow.

Go carefully through your story and discover the real punch. Find out precisely what it is that makes an appeal to you and then write that in so that it will present itself to the Editor in the best possible light. Add such other detail as your space affords, but if you need, if you really need the whole space to tell about the punch use it for the punch alone. The Editor has no time to search your plot of action. He turns to the synopsis to find your story there. Put there what you most desire that he should see and leave the rest in the plot of action. If you have put enough in the front page to gain his interest, you will have insured the reading of the entire script.

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## CHAPTER IX

### CONDENSING THE SCRIPT

**Keeping the action short—aim to tell much in few words—the reason for terseness—needless explanation—by-play and the real action.**

It should be the aim of the writer not so much to have each scene run not more than four or five lines as not to need a greater number of words to fully explain the action. Just as the leaderless script is one in which leader is not needed rather than one in which leader is not shown, so the terse script is one that needs no more words rather than the short scene that needs more to fully convey the ideas to the director.

The object to be aimed at is not brevity alone, but brevity with clearness. It is better to write more fully and get the idea over than to write the brief but obscure script, and it is probable that at first the scripts of the novice will run too full. It is better to let them run what they will until a growing familiarity of action enables the writer to condense.

The need for this condensation is two-fold. The simple direction is less confusing to the director and at the same time gives point to the action and throws it into relief. The average director can get a better idea of a short scene from three lines of typewrit-

ing than from thirty, for with the greater lengths there will be much that is unnecessary and redundant.

Let us suppose that Jack and Tom meet and that Tom suggests to Jack that they go and see Harry. The meeting takes place on the street. A person not familiar with photoplay form might be expected to write it something like this:

- 7- A street corner, showing a handsome house in the rear with a lawn in front. In the distance Jack is seen approaching, walking along briskly and swinging his cane. Just before he gets to the corner Tom comes in from the opposite direction. He and Jack see each other and smile. As they come closer Jack shakes hands with Tom and they both turn and face the camera. They talk for a few minutes, and finally Tom suggests to Jack that they go and see Harry. Jack says he doesn't mind, so Tom turns back and he and Jack come walking toward the camera, talking and laughing. They pass out of the scene.

Now all of this is a part of the action of the scene, but very little of it is essential to the telling of the story. It would be just as possible to play this scene in front of a brick house setting flush with the sidewalk, in front of a saloon or store or in front of a vacant lot. That there is a handsome house in the rear of the scene is not essential to the story, though it makes for a landscape effect.

The director, far more than the author, is alive to the necessity for pretty backgrounds where they are to be had. Without needing to be told, he will procure the best background he can obtain without too much trouble. This, then, will leave merely the street corner.

But why the street corner? The action would be as plain if the meeting occurred in the middle of the block. That still further cuts it down. We say simply "street" instead of street corner. It is not very important that we gain a word here, but it is important that we reduce the direction to its simplest form, for now the director sees that the corner has nothing to do with the meeting. In the middle of the block there may be a house vastly superior to one to be found on any corner. He could tell from the full script that it did not have to be on a corner, but he has more important matters to consider than this and the more simple direction will be better and so we say "Street" and let it go at that. Nothing more is needed. It is not always possible to say merely that it is a street scene. It may be that the scene would lose force if it were not played in the business section instead of a

street suggestive of the suburbs. In such a case ask for precisely the sort of street you want. Say it is a "business street," "residential street," "street in suburbs," "village street," or whatever you want, but when you have just a street and any street will do, the producer will naturally pick a place where he is making the rest of the exteriors.

We have cut sixteen words down to one, but that is just as a starter. It is not important that Jack swings his cane or even that he carries one. Maybe he will have one and perhaps the producer will tell him to swing it, but if he doesn't swing the cane or even have it, it will be just as good a scene. In a story you tell about the swinging cane because it helps to create in the mind of the reader the picture of Jack coming down the street, but here you have a real picture. You see Jack coming down the street with the eye and not with the mind. It is not necessary to create the mental picture as it would be in fiction, because you have here the physical and not merely the mental picture.

Suppose that the director used your stage directions and had them talk "a couple of minutes." How much of a picture do you suppose he would get if the whole play were planned along the same generous lines? With two minutes for a chat you would have half the audience asleep. That sort of stuff simply clogs up the script. Let's try and do better than that.

- 7- Street- Jack comes walking down the street. As he comes close to the camera Tom enters from the opposite side. They smile at each other, shake hands and chat. Tom suggests that they go down to see Harry. Jack is willing and they come toward the camera, passing out of the scene.

That's a lot better because it is shorter, but it is not short enough yet. It should be possible to do even better. Let us study the script again. Let's find out *just what* this scene means.

What we are trying to show is this: Jack and Tom go to see Harry. They do not deliberately plan to meet and go to see him. It happens that they meet and that Tom suggests that they go and see him. That makes what happens at Harry's stronger than if they had planned to be there. That is the reason why we show the chance meeting on the street instead of simply having them come to Harry's house. It is an accidental meeting. We can see that because one is not waiting for the other by appointment. They just happen to come together. Now that's all we need to tell the director. Let's tell him just that. He knows perfectly well how two men will act when they are walking along the street. He can do all that stuff himself, but he can't know that unless we

tell him, because he didn't write the story. Put down just what you need. Something like this, perhaps:

7- Street- Jack and Tom meet. They shake hands and chat.  
Tom suggests that they go and see Harry. Jack agrees.  
They pass out of the scene.

That's shorter yet, and still it's so plain that the director knows just what we want to get. We have the meeting and the suggestion of the visit. Perhaps we can do better yet. Let's try it. This time we'll drop the punctuation and try that scheme of using hyphens. We will get something that looks like this:

7- Street- Jack and Tom meet- greetings- Tom speaks- Jack assents- they exit.

That is one line of typewriting instead of nine that we had in the first place. That's a little different, isn't it? We have taken away none of the essential action, the action that tells the story, but we have removed a lot of useless direction that any director knows enough to put in himself.

When he comes to handle this scene he will look it over. At a glance he sees that this is the scene where Jack and Tom meet. That's all he needs to know. He tells the players what to do. They do it and pass on to the next scene.

Suppose that the scene is a wedding. We do not have to write half a page telling how the stage is set and how the ceremony is performed and all that sort of thing. Suppose that what we are trying to show is that Paul comes down the aisle with Mary on his arm and shrinks back as he passes Gertrude, whom he deserted for Mary. That is a telling situation, but it does not need many words. We do not have to tell that a ribbon is run along the pews to hold the guests back until the bridal party has passed. We do not have to describe how the bridal party acts, what the minister does and all that. All we need to say is that Gertrude is all broken up and that she faces Paul.

Now it will be effective to show Gertrude during the ceremony and as they come down the aisle, but that would take too much film, because we should have to show a part of the ceremony and then the march down the aisle. It would be better to first show Gertrude taking her place in the pew. This scene gives the suggestion that something is going to happen. We cannot leave her sitting there. We will have to break. Perhaps we show a flash of Mary getting out of the carriage. Now we have her come

down the aisle and past Gertrude. At the far end she meets Paul, and they start to get married. It's going to be pretty hard to cut from that, because there isn't much to cut back to, but we must do something to get out of the church or else show the entire ceremony, if only a brief one.

Perhaps earlier in the picture we showed that Sam wants to marry Gertrude. Perhaps we can cut to Sam wondering what effect the marriage will have on his chances. Now we go back to the church and give Gertrude a chance to show her emotion. We go back to Sam again for a moment and come back to the church as the bridal party passes down the aisle. For a moment Paul is staggered as he sees Gertrude but he pulls himself together and passes on.

Here we have done two sorts of condensation. We have cut down the number of words by not telling all about the church and we have cut down the length of action by showing seven scenes instead of one. All seven do not use up as much film as the long service would, and yet we have come to the church each time there was an important and essential phase in the action.

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## CHAPTER X

### PLOT FORMATION

**Incident is not plot—story must have an object—the happy ending—only one leading character—the need for struggle—sources of plots.**

In the preceding pages a working knowledge of photoplay form has been gained, but photoplay form is merely the means to an end and not the end itself. Photoplay form enables the author to present his story in its most attractive guise of perfect workmanship, but if there is no story to be presented, the elaborate care bestowed upon form will avail the author nothing. Form is the flesh, the idea is the spirit; the soul that vivifies and gives life to the flesh. The photoplay is a story told in action and a story is no more than a plot.

Most beginners are too prone to regard connected incident as a plot. So that the action follows from one incident to another they are content, not realizing that the plot is that which makes these connected incidents a story by giving those incidents some reason for being shown.

Suppose it occurs to you that you can make a capital comedy of the trials of a book agent. There are all sorts of chances for fun in what happens to a book salesman, so you string a lot of these funny things together and regard your work with satisfaction. You've been told that a comedy story must have plenty of action and humorous action, at that, so this must be a good story because it is just full of funny things.

The book agent starts out in the morning. He is kicked out of an office, is chased from a house by an irate housewife armed with a broom, he is doused with water at another place, and so it goes for twenty or thirty scenes, according to how your inventiveness holds out.

All your friends have laughed themselves sick over the funny things you've written, and they will assure you that it is a better story than those they see on the screen, but not one of them knows enough, probably, to tell you that it isn't a story at all, and probably you would not believe the man who said such a thing, yet it is no more a story than is the multiplication table. You do not have to stop at twelve times twelve. You can run it up to forty-two times twelve or a hundred and eighteen times twelve and still have a million times twelve to look forward to. A multiplication table has a start, but practically no ending, and so has this story. You can write forty scenes or sixty or six hundred and still arrive at no definite ending, and a story must have a beginning, a middle and an end. That's been the standard definition of a play for centuries and it holds as good today as the day it was written.

This story has a start, because we see the man is a book agent and he wants to sell his books. It has no finish because he is not working toward some definite end. He may keep on wanting to sell books to the day of his death. That would end the story, but we could keep on putting in funny things—if we can think of enough—to run the story up to a million feet.

The story must not only have a start, but an objective point. Now we'll take this book agent and write a real story about him. The agent is Tim Green and John Smith kicks him out of his office. That kick is the start of the story we are going to write, because Tim gets angry and vows that he'll sell Smith a copy of that book if it takes him a year. Now there is the story, the story of how Tim sells a book to Smith. When he makes the sale or gives it up it ends. Here we have the three requisites, the start, or beginning, which is that Smith kicks Tim out of his office; the middle, or the efforts Tim makes to sell the book; and the end, or climax, which may be either that he does sell the book or gives up his attempt.

Tim gets kicked out of the office and vows revenge. Next morning he is sitting on Smith's steps as Smith leaves for the office. Smith kicks Tim off the steps and takes a car for the office. Tim takes a taxicab and gets there first. He is waiting for Smith in front of the office building. He pushes his way into Smith's office a little later and when Smith kicks him out again he tries to crawl through the transom. Smith has the transom nailed down and Tim calls him on the telephone. Smith has the telephone connection cut. Tim walks along the cornice and so into the open window. Smith throws him out of the window. All day long Tim pursues Smith, and follows him home at night. Smith steals out the back way and goes to his club, leaving Tim on the steps. Smith has a good time at the club and rolls home about two in the morning with a couple of companions. Tim is asleep on the steps. He wakes and not only sells Smith the book, but he sells one to each of his friends.

Can you see now how giving Tim an object to work for has made something of a story out of mere incident? Before we simply laughed when something happened to Tim, because it looked funny. Now there is a mental appeal as well. We are interested in Tim. We want to see him sell that book to Smith. Every time Tim meets a rebuff we are sorry for him even while we laugh and when, at last, he sells the book we are genuinely glad. The *plot* has given interest to the *incidents*. In the aimless incident we might see Tim make twenty sales, and they would not interest us one-tenth as much as this one sale, because this is a story of the sale of that book.

The story starts with the determination to sell the book and stops with the accomplishment of the sale. It might run on and on and tell how Smith acted when he woke the next morning and realized what he had done, how the books were delivered and all that, but this is the story of the sale of the book and stops when the sale is accomplished. Tim has sold other books and will sell others in the future, but they have nothing to do with the story.

But if we were telling the story of Tim Green and how he came to the city and made enough money selling books to pay off the mortgage on the old home, the sale of that book to Smith would be only a part of the story. The sale of books to Jones and Brown and Black and White would also be parts of the story, for this story has a different plot in which the start is the fact that Tim determines to pay off the mortgage, the middle is the sale of the books, which enables him to do so, and the end is the payment of the mortgage money. The story of the

sale to Jones and Brown and Black and White might all be made a story, the same as was the sale of the book to Smith, but the object aimed at determines the value of each incident and the five sales would merely be parts of the story, the same as all the other sales, which might have been shown or merely suggested.

Every story, whether it be comedy or drama, farce or tragedy, deals with the encountering of some obstacle. If the obstacle is overcome, the story is said to have a happy ending. If defeat is met with it is said to have an unhappy ending.

At the first reading this may sound like too broad a statement. You may feel that you have read hundreds of stories that present no obstacle, but if you will study them more closely you will find that every real story has this element of "struggle" else it would not be a real story. The story of the man who has been out the night before and wants to keep the fact from his wife may seem to possess no struggle, but the statement of the story itself presents the struggle. He is struggling to keep the facts from his wife. And here is one of the curious points. If you are telling the story of how Sam Sprague sought to keep his wife from knowing that he was tipsy the night before and tried to thrash a policeman, the story has a happy ending if he succeeds. But if you take the wife's side, if you make it the story of how the wife tried to find out what Sam was up to the night before, the story can have a happy ending only if the unfortunate Sam is exposed.

It may seem odd that the same ending may be happy or unhappy, as the farce is played, but the reason is plain if you will take the trouble to study it out. In the first instance we are siding with Sam, hoping that the facts will not come out. In the other development we are on the side of the wife and want to see Sam exposed.

There can be only one central character in a story. There is a hero and a heroine, as a rule, but there can be but one leading character, and as we have seen above this can be either the hero or the heroine. The interest should not and generally cannot be divided between two persons.

If the story is a romance with a strong love interest, you will not feel equally interested in the man and the girl. Either you will want to see a match for the girl's sake or on account of the man. In the usual triangle of two women and a man, we either want the man to get the woman he desires or we want one of the two women to get the man both want. We cannot sit on and watch the struggle without "taking sides" unless the story is so badly told as not to interest us at all.

Take it the other way around. There are two men and a girl. She is the central figure. She cannot marry both, but if we are interested in her we want her to marry the right one and perhaps we feel that we would like to tell her that she is foolish to care for John, who has a wife living, when Frank is such a fine fellow. Frank is not the central figure, the girl holds our interest, but because it is the girl we are interested in, we want to see her marry Frank and not the villainous John. The clever author will carry the story along with the general suggestion that she is going to marry John. Now and then it will seem that Frank has a chance, but the next scene will show John more firmly entrenched than ever. Then, all of a sudden, in walks that wife of his and has John arrested for desertion and non-support. You can guess what the finish of that story will be.

If it had seemed all along that Frank would get the girl and that John never had a chance, the element of struggle (which is more or less another name for suspense) would have been so slight that it would scarcely seem a story at all.

The fully equipped author is like a typist. He knows that to strike a certain key will print a certain letter. He strikes three keys and gets the word "and"; he strikes three others and gets "the." He knows which keys to strike to get certain word effects and he strikes these keys almost unconsciously.

In stories his keyboard is the gamut of human emotions. He knows which to strike to secure any desired effect. Sometimes his fingers slip and he strikes the wrong key, just as the typist does, but the greater the practise the typist has, the more nearly correct is the writing, and the same holds true of the keyboard of the emotions.

But to have a plot is not sufficient. This plot must be new to command attention. There are very few starting ideas or master plots, but the combinations of incident are many, just as the twenty-six letters on the typewriter keyboard can produce any of the words of any language. It should be the aim to get a new combination of incident.

It is practically impossible to evolve anything that is absolutely new in every aspect.

Take for instance the wireless operator on a ship in distress who sticks at his post for forty-eight hours summoning to the aid of the imperiled passengers. Surely this must be new, because the wireless telegraph is a comparatively recent invention. The use of the wireless is new, but the master plot is old. Almost everyone is familiar with the story of the little boy whose tiny hand stopped the trickling flow that averted the break in the dike that would have inundated miles of territory.

Both stories have the same master plot as have other stories dating back through the centuries.

When a story is returned by an editor with the statement that it lacks originality, he does not mean that he demands something absolutely new, but that he does require a greater freshness of treatment than has been shown. Perhaps the greatest trouble that the beginner has is to determine between the old and the new. A story seems fresh to him because he has not seen it, yet it may have been done on the screen scores of times and in manuscript hundreds of times. It may even be a true story; something that happened to you or some friend and yet have found its parallel elsewhere. The fact that once, when Uncle George was away from home, Aunt Emma thought that burglars were in the house and found that it was only the cat, does not make it impossible that there should have been other Aunt Emmas and Uncle Georges and other cats.

Ninety per cent. of the stories sent into the studio are worthless because they possess no originality, and this applies to true stories as well as to the creations of your imagination. Most experienced writers avoid the true story as they would the pest; not only because it is apt to be not new, but because the possession of established facts limits the imagination. You try to stick to the points of the real story and your imagination is cramped.

Before you cut your literary teeth there are going to be a lot of old stories that you are going to write because it would seem that every writer must do them at least once. Probably the favorite plot of the novice, is the one in which the workman (generally he is a drunken workman) loses his job and goes to kill his employer. As he steals through the shrubbery he sees that the house is afire, or that burglars are about to break in, or someone is stealing the employer's little child or the child is about to be bitten by a mad dog. Whatever it is, he fixes it up and gets a vote of thanks and his job back. That story has been written thousands of times and was run on the screen about every three months until the public tired of it.

Then there's the little child that is stolen by the gypsies. Twenty years later mother hears a street beggar singing. "My God! My daughter's voice!" It is a certainty that you'll write one about the little grandchild that wins its grandparents' forgiveness for a runaway match. Write it, since you must, but do not waste postage on it. If all the little grandchildren that "squared" mother or father, and the others that kept mamma and papa from getting divorces, were to march in single file, the procession would take three days to pass a given point.

Mind you, that isn't saying that you cannot write and sell a story under the title "A Little Child Shall Lead Them." It has been done and perhaps you can do it, too, but remember that you have a thousand or more other stories on the same lines to beat if you want to make a sale.

Newspaper paragraphs help to good plots at times if you pick the right sort, but lately some of the film stories have been used by newspaper correspondents to "make copy."

The out of town correspondent in the small places is paid by the daily paper only when he has something used. If news is scarce he may go to the photoplay theater and send out a condensation of some film story as a news dispatch. It may be printed, other papers may copy it and you may pick up the plot only to be told that the subject has been used before.

If you do use clippings take the obscure items. If a Titanic sinks, hundreds of stories will be rushed into the studios dealing with that subject and it is probable that every one will be rejected. Every big news item is taken by scores and hundreds of authors. When Andrew Carnegie interested himself in Andrew Toth, a mine worker who had served half a lifetime for a crime of which he was innocent, fully five hundred manuscripts were written from the idea. None sold because each studio was afraid that some other film maker would get out a story on the subject first.

The same paper that told of Toth might have carried a dozen good tips. Seek your inspiration from the five or ten line local item and let your imagination do the rest. If you can really write stories, all your imagination will need is a gentle push to get it started. Take an item like this, and see what it will suggest:

In the Children's Court yesterday James Donovan, nine years of age, was charged with selling papers without a permit. Agent Simms, of the Children's Aid Society, reported that investigation disclosed the fact that the boy had been supporting two younger children while their father was in the hospital. The Society will care for the three until the father is discharged.

You can write a dozen stories from that. You do not have to stick to those facts. Start with the idea of the boy who makes the home and then let your fancy do the rest.

It is possible to get a suggestion from a copyrighted story that will give you something utterly unlike. If the result is utterly unlike you are justified in using the inspiration, since that is all you do use.

Take Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde, for example. That would seem to be a pretty hard story to steal, yet the master plot is merely that of dual personality treated by a master of style and

imagination. You cannot make another Jekyl and Hyde, but suppose your character is a man who is a good husband and a loving father, unless he is drinking and that a single glass of whiskey will transform him into a brute.

You can work that into a drama from several angles or you can turn it into a comedy. It doesn't look much like a comedy, but just suppose that the man is a miser and hordes every penny, but the moment he tastes alcohol he spends lavishly. That is a distinctly comedy aspect of a seemingly serious theme.

Most stories do have their serious and comedy aspects and the tragedy that fails may sell quickly as a comedy or even a farce.

Having found an acceptable plot, the next question is one of possibility and plausibility. A story may be wholly possible and yet utterly lack plausibility. One author complained that a studio had rejected the story of an operation performed by a surgeon-missionary's wife in the jungles of Africa. He offered to give names and addresses to prove the correctness of his plot. It was entirely possible that the operation was performed, but it would not seem plausible to the audiences. It was a thing so exceptional that it would carry no conviction.

You may argue with the editor as to the possibility of this thing and that, but he cannot pass the argument along to the millions who might see the film, and so he passes the story back because it is not plausible, not because it is not possible that such a thing may have happened. Here we have the converse of the over-common true story. Do not follow the commonplace, but on the other hand do not offer the fact so unusual that it must be seen to be believed.

The question of expense, too, cuts an important figure. If you write a fiction story and have the troops go marching by, you do not have to pay each man from two to five dollars a day. If you write of a steamer wreck, it costs no more to wreck an ocean liner than a small rowboat, but in a picture you must wreck the steamer or else find one already wrecked. Do not figure that they can make a trick picture because "they can make a camera do anything." They can, but even then they must get the steamer and it costs money to charter a steamer of the proper size.

Perhaps in a farce you have the comedian thrown off the train because he cannot pay his fare. First you see him in the car and then train stops and he is kicked off. It costs a lot of money to build a car set and it will cost \$50 to stop the train between stations, since you must hire a special train, but it will cost only \$5 or \$10 if you use a street car instead, and it will be much less trouble because a car will be hired on some line near the studio where it might be necessary to go fifty or one hundred

miles to get the train, since it must be worked on some little traveled branch instead of the main line. It costs nothing to picture a man getting on or off a train standing in the station. The player merely climbs the steps and gets down on the other side or climbs up from the opposite side and comes down on the camera side of the train as though he had just alighted.

Ships in dock can be gotten by most companies, even those in Chicago, but a ship that must be moved must be chartered, and this mounts the cost up tremendously without giving much return in effect.

Automobiles are used to carry the players around for the outside scenes and are always at hand. It is better to use an auto than a carriage where there is a choice.

Stories partly in America and partly in foreign countries are difficult to produce and are seldom convincing. It is possible to play the foreign scenes in a succession of interior sets, but have no scenes calling for exteriors, houses or other structures. Mexican and South American plays can be made by those companies located in the south or southwest, but it is not possible, for example, to give a convincing street scene in Paris or Berlin without going to those cities.

Costume plays add to the cost, since costumes must be furnished by the company; the players being required to supply only modern costumes. When you see a costume play on the screen you may feel assured that there was some particular reason for the production that would have no bearing on your own script should you send it in. It may be that the company came into possession of the costumes and wrote the plays to fit, or the owner of the company may have wanted a picture of a certain type. The chance of sale is so limited that it will not pay you to write costume plays.

Most studios are willing to go to considerable expense now and then in producing something out of the ordinary for the sake of the advertisement and because of the larger European sales, but it is best to leave the costly productions to the studio force or wait until you are able to get direct orders from the Editor. As a rule most manufacturers keep the cost down and look to the plot to make the strength rather than to the mechanical effects.

Another requisite of the good plot is a small *acting* cast. Some companies want plays that can use many persons, but the story must be held to not more than four or five people if it is to be clear and understandable. Other characters may be introduced as required, but the narrative must center about one person and the bulk of the work of developing that narrative should

fall to not more than four or five persons. More active characters will be confusing and the audience cannot carry all of the identifications in their heads. Use as many persons as the story needs, but make prominent only a few and let them tell the story. The butler who brings in the letter is a character, but he does not figure prominently. The maid who assists her mistress to elope is important.

And lastly, let me make a plea for the plot with the happy ending. There are many "strong" stories where a happy ending is possible, but you are not required to write these. Write the wholesome, joyous story and leave the morbid and the unpleasant to others. The temptation is strong to write the tragic plot, but the demand is for pleasant things. You may be impressed with "Romeo and Juliet," but the greater appeal is made by the heart interest story and the demand is so much more urgent for this class of plays that you will find it profitable to hold to pleasant things and leave the tragic to others.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### EVOLVING A PLOT

**Deriving plots from nothing—from the title—from a start—  
from a climax—knowledge of the subject necessary—  
writing to order—from suggestion.**

Various writers have differing ideas as to the best manner of evolving the plot. The beginner will, for a time, do well to wait for inspiration, to wait until he has a story to write before he starts to write it, but even the beginner can find good practise and instruction in the evolution of the plot from nothing.

The best plot is apt to be the one that comes to you naturally and seems almost to write itself. That story is almost certain to be better than the one that is manufactured, but the writer cannot always wait for these inspirations and it is well to learn how to create a plot from a suggestion so slight that it seems to be nothing.

One favorite way is to think up a catchy title and write a story to fit the title. Suppose that we take "His Happy Home," which is the first that occurs. That sort of title is equally applicable to a drama or a farce, but as a farce the title should be a sar-

casm and the home anything but happy. His wife nags and his children worry him. What next? Does he start to run away from that happy home, or does he make the home really happy? In the first of these we might make the escape a dream, and he wakes to find himself still at home, but dream plays have been overdone and to most Editors "It was a dream" is like a red rag to a bull. As a rule the dream play is the last resort of an author whose story is too wildly improbable to pass as anything else.

If he runs away from home he must be brought back, otherwise the moral is misplaced and there will be as many who will think of the deserted wife as will rejoice in the victim's escape.

On the other hand suppose that the home really is happy until the wife turns reformer or suffragette or something and the once happy home is overrun by weak-minded men and strong-minded women.

Here is another idea. Hubby is henpecked. He doesn't even dare speak in his own home. There is a club of henpecks and in the gymnasium each has a dummy figure of his wife that he uses as a punching bag. Hubby talks of his "other wife" in his sleep and the wife gets jealous, with the result that the wife and the other wives descend on the club and put it out of business. Now we call it "His Other Wife." We have the story and we still have the title to suggest another story.

As a drama the happy home may be wrecked by the business ambition of the man, by the social ambition of the woman, by some tempter, either man or woman, by the growing dissipation of the husband, through the loss of money, through the death of an only child or any other means.

In working from the climax you conceive a strong situation and then work back to the start. Suppose that we take this idea: A man loves a woman other than his wife. In a moment of danger he may save but one of the two women. Which one does he save, the woman he loves or the woman who loves him? Why did he make his choice?

Don't try to answer your question yet. You are not in a position to answer, for you do not know the facts of the case. First manufacture the facts by working back to the start of the story, and then make your decision. You have a man and two women, one of whom is his wife. Now you can either first show the man and his wife or else go back of the marriage and show, if you wish, that the other woman really has the more logical claim on his affections.

Here again, you have two choices. Shall the other woman be the man's mistress or shall she nurse a hopeless but chaste pas-

sion. Suppose that we decide in favor of the former. The man first marries and then meets a woman of superior mental or physical attraction. He forgets his vows and turns to her. The wife discovers the situation, but is helpless, making her feeble fight with no hope of victory. Here you have the resignation of the wife to contrast with the evil triumph of the other woman. Then comes the big moment. The man must make a quick decision. One woman is guilty in her love, the other is not. In that great moment his heart turns again to the woman to whom he promised protection and he bears her in safety not alone to life, but to a new happiness. It may be that the other woman is saved in some means and lives on, suffering a greater punishment in the success of her rival than if death had claimed her.

If the decision is made in favor of the woman he loves, the end can be nothing but misery. This is not because of the moral of the church, but the moral of the picture. In stories an evil action must be punished by evil. The spectre of the dead wife must ever stand between them. Happiness will not be possible because it will outrage the sense of justice. The man's unhappiness is the punishment for his crime.

Taking the story of the purer love for the woman not his wife, we have a new set of developments. We find the man who has married for some reason other than love, in the fulfillment of a death-bed promise, to save a woman's name, or any other chivalrous reason. The woman he loves knows and understands. The love is pure, but hopeless. Then comes the decision. If the wife is left, the road is open to marriage. If the wife is saved love is lost. It is the other woman who makes the decision in accordance with her entire course of action. She makes him save the wife turning to face the death she does not fear.

Here, too, it is possible to work to the happy finish. In spite of all the man can do, the wife is not saved. The other woman survives. Honorable marriage is now open to them and they have no cause for reproach. It is what we have been wishing for all along and did not dare hope for.

The best climax is that which comes as a surprise and satisfies the wishes of the audience after it has been made to appear that this consummation is utterly impossible.

Having worked back to the start, perhaps we find that the story moves in some other direction toward a new climax. Perhaps the discovery of the husband's infidelity caused the death of the wife and, all too late he discovers that it was his wife whom he really loved. He faces his punishment in a loveless

life, for now his illicit love has turned to hatred. In death the wife has triumphed over the woman she could not vanquish in life.

A third method is to start with the beginning of the story and work for the climax. Here the start of the story is the commencement of the reasoning instead of the climax.

Suppose a man passionately devoted to a woman who does not love him. How does he win her love? Suppose that they are married. He may win her love through his tender care or he may win her through pretended indifference. He may love her enough to let her get a divorce that she may marry a man she thinks she loves, but that very self sacrifice may show her which is the truer heart. She may have a harmless love affair with another man and turn to her husband on the rebound, or any one of perhaps a hundred developments may be used.

We may work to the climax and then find that it would be better for the story if the woman loved the man instead of the reverse. It is a simple matter to turn back to the fresh start.

It may not come easy to the author at the start to evolve plots from little or nothing, but perseverance will bring results in exact ratio to the training the imagination receives. Some persons are too matter of fact to invent plots. There is little hope for them, but given the ability to think out a story plot, training will bring development just as gymnasium work will produce better muscular proportions.

The man or woman who would write stories must study constantly to acquire a general fund of information. If you write of a broker you must know how brokers act, if you write of firemen you must know the life of the fireman. One play that caused much merriment in the studios had an unframed photograph of the broker's office staff on the mantel of his dining-room that he might point out to his daughter the man he thought stole the bonds. That would do very well for the home of a mechanic who might have a photograph of the shop force taken by some itinerant photographer, but it was wholly out of place in the dining-room of a wealthy man of reasonably good taste.

If you write of courts, follow court procedure. If you do not know what that procedure is, ask some lawyer. If you write of physicians and know little about it, consult a doctor. Consult him also about diseases with which you are not familiar.

If your hero is jailed on a false charge, do not have him turned loose the moment his innocence is proven. You cannot go right down to the jail and tell the Warden that it is all right.

If he has been arraigned, but not yet tried, he must go before the committing magistrate and there the case will be dismissed. If he has been tried and sentenced, only a pardon from the Governor or a reopening of the case will suffice.

If your hero is about to be executed and you suddenly discover the proof of innocence, you do not drop around to the jail and tell the Warden to wait. The Warden is not a judge and cannot pass on the evidence. You must get a court stay or appeal to the Governor for a reprieve. The Warden is placed in his position to obey the orders of the court. The order of the court is that the man must be put to death. That is all the Warden has to do with the matter.

It is not necessary to be a westerner to write western stories, nor to have been in India to write of the East Indies, but it is necessary to know something of the life and habits of the people you write about and to know sufficient to be able to write intelligently.

It is not probable that you would have the millionaire banker go to work with a tin dinner pail in his hand or have the ditch digger ride to his work in a taxicab, but you may make some trifling mistake just as ridiculous as this to those who know. The millionaire, for example, who takes five one thousand dollar bills out of his pocket and pays for the automobile he is buying is just as improbable and just as laughable as the millionaire who puts on overalls before he takes his place at his mahogany desk.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### DEVELOPING THE PLOT

Possibilities of the plot—getting the plot on paper—the picture eye—do not be afraid to change—watch for situations—the increasing interest.

Having evolved the plot, the next thing to do is to develop the plot into the complete play. You may have a good plot and still fail of success because the development is not as good as the idea.

It is a grave error to suppose that your plot can have but a single development. It is capable of change so long as the script remains in your possession. As was pointed out in the

last chapter, each start has many endings just as every ending may be arrived at from many points. Regard the start as a dot in the center of a circle and the circumference as the climax. From the center you can work out to any point of the circumference. Because you have the plot fairly well in mind is no reason why you should not change it when you have come to the work of development.

In developing your plot you start from the center and work outward. You have a certain point in mind at which you are aiming, but as the story grows, scene by scene, it may be that you will find that it is taking another direction. Follow the lead and see what it produces. If you do not like it you can go back to your original idea, but often you will find the new idea better than the old.

The component parts of the photoplay are like the digits in a written sum. Let your scene represent the figure one and the second move number three, and you have the sum of thirteen. If the second move is four, you have another combination. If the number of the start is two instead of one you have another combination. With two digits you have 99 possible combinations, with three 999, and with four 9999. So it is with your story. Each added factor makes for a new form. Examine these factors well and decide which will best suit your purpose and your mood.

That last advice may sound odd, but you will find there are times when you can do better with comedy than with drama or fare better with the story of adventure than with the romance, or vice versa. If you want to write of adventure and start to write of love, you spoil a chance to write a good adventure story by writing a poor romance.

It is only the veteran who can sit down to the machine and tell himself that he is going to write a romance, a comedy or whatever it is he needs at the moment. The new writer will do better to humor his fancy a little until he has the work better in hand.

And do not be in too much of a hurry to write a story of any sort. Keep at the evolution until you have the main points pretty well in mind and in orderly arrangement. Then when you go to the machine you can write that story if no new development presents itself.

It is not possible to lay down exact rules for writing. One author may work best under pressure and another need leisure and quiet, but in most cases it is a mistake to sit and stare at the machine in the hope that an idea may come. Unconsciously you resent the fact that you must write, and so you cannot.

You can think as well in another part of the room, on the street, wherever you may go. You will most probably do better work if you do not approach the machine until you are really ready to begin work.

You may find that it is better to write the synopsis or sketch the action in on a slip of paper, suggesting with a word or two the entire scene, but most writers are able to keep the plot vivid in their mind without the aid of memoranda. Experiment until you find what system suits you best. No one can tell but yourself.

The important thing in this first draft is not to let the technique of form get the better of the technique of development. The man who perpetually stops to argue with himself whether this is an "on screen" or a bust or stops to figure whenever he should write "same as" or "back to," will never get very far as a creative writer. He burdens his mind so much with the details that he cramps it for the broader work. The artist who worries whether there ought to be seven or nine hairs in his smallest brush will never paint a masterpiece. Your first draft should be made in the first glow of enthusiasm. Now, if ever, you are inspired. Catch the inspiration before it dies. There is plenty of time later for revision and editing. Occupy your mind only with the details of the plot, with making the story real, and you can get the rest with revision if it is needed.

If you have waited long enough you have a pretty good idea of your characters and about how they would act. *Now try and see them actually act.* Let them go through with the action just as you want it played and note down the leading actions as they play it.

This is what has been called the "picture eye," the ability to visualize words or thoughts into actions. Unless you can see the action with your mental vision you cannot write it and your picture will be flat and unconvincing.

You do not have to write all the action you see, but only the action that helps to tell the story. You do not, for example, say:

Jim flicks the ashes from his cigarette, shoots down his cuffs, straightens his tie, throws away his cigarette, and with a confident air approaches Edith. Sitting on the sofa beside her, he takes her hand and in his rich, musical voice tells her the old, old story.

That would all be very well if you were writing a novel and getting so much for each thousand words, but in photoplay you

want to give the director only the really important business. Instead of all the petty details you give just the essential action and write:

Jim crosses to Edith- sits- proposes.

This will save you time and save the director both time and trouble. Jim has to cross the room. He has to sit beside Edith. He has to propose. Those are three essential facts. The rest are details. He need not shoot down his cuffs and he does not have to be smoking.

Lose yourself as completely as you can in your story. Get interested in it and think of it as a story and not as something you have to write. Do not even think of technique. Be occupied only with the running plot. If your leader runs too long, let it run. If your letter threatens to go over the word limit, let it go. You can condense when you cannot do creative work. Catch the story while you are in the mood. That twenty word leader can be cut to five when the fires of genius have burned out and you are raking over the ashes of revision, but you haven't the time right now to stop and worry about a leader. The main point is to get the warm, living story down on paper. Give it every ounce that there is in you. When you have it all down on paper where it can't get away from you, then you can stand back and look at it and criticise and revise, but you must first catch your story.

In the course of time you'll probably reach the point where the best means of handling a given situation will at once suggest itself to you and you can write a story and put it right into the mail box with a reasonably good chance of a sale, but until you reach that point you must count on revision and so you need not be too particular with your first draft. It's what the Editor sees that counts and you may change your story half a dozen times between the first draft and the last. Even after it has gone and come back again you may find things to be changed. That man is hopeless who is bound to the first development of the script unless he is one of those few who either write a good story the first time or else write another one.

There is a class of writer who cannot revise. He must do his best work the first time or else he will revise and work over his script until he has taken every particle of life out of it.

Stage dancers have a technical term, "elevation," that has reference to their carriage. If the dancer seems to reach down and tap the floor with his feet while floating about, instead of showing that he is springing from the floor, he is said to have good elevation.

The story, too, must have elevation. There must be the same appearance of lightness, the same careful concealment of hard work. It must seem spontaneous and natural. The action must move easily and consistently from scene to scene, each advancing in some degree the plot itself. There should be no undue bustle and confusion, none of the running in and out of scenes that Editors call "going and coming." In comedy there must be greater liveliness of action, but in comedy or drama there should be no flurry of entrances or exits. In drama the movement of the story should be like the flow of a great river. There should be no appearance of hurry, but always the suggestion of strength and power in reserve. But like the river approaching the rapids, there must come the quickening movement and then the rush of the climax.

Keep the action well proportioned. Do not have people appear in houses other than their own without apparent reason. Do not drag the characters around from place to place just to have them handy. The whole value of a photoplay depends upon the closeness with which it simulates real life. Write of real people performing natural actions. Do not put in matter that does not properly belong "to make it seem more interesting." Get the interest out of your plot and you will not have to send your hero into the air in a flying machine or to the bottom of the ocean in a submarine. There are good stories to be written around aeroplanes or submarines, and perhaps you can write those stories, but do not drag them into stories in which they do not belong simply because you cannot get natural interest and feel that you must do something desperate to command attention. Do not bolster up a weak story with an elephant or a railroad wreck. Put more story in.

Keep your eyes open for striking situations and effective bits of business. Do not, as a rule, write in the by-play, but if you get something really good, write it out for the director. One of the best of the directors owes his success largely to the fact that no matter how commonplace the story may be, he gives it one or two very human touches that makes the whole production appear real and vivid. It may not be an important action. It may have no real bearing on the plot, but it is like the little leaven that leaveneth the whole. It gives reality to the entire story. More than one story has hung on in other studios on the strength of one or two clever bits that has lifted the script above the commonplace.

Do not trust to the climax alone to carry your story. Graduate the intensity of the action with succeeding scenes so that

you work up to your climax. Do not loaf along until just before the end and then spring a climax that is all out of proportion to what has gone before. It is easier to ascend an inclined plane than to climb a high fence and the climax presented suddenly after weak action is like the fence. The audience is not prepared for it. Lift your audience up gradually.

Plan your climax as late as possible. In the earlier scenes you can arrange a series of minor climaxes, or crises, each a little stronger than the other, but none approaching the real climax, but you cannot put your climax in the middle of your play and hold the interest through the falling action that follows. Your climax is the biggest moment in your play. All that comes after that is in a descending scale. In that little book agent story we wrote, the climax comes when Smith and his friends bought the books. Then Tim says "Thank you. Good night" and the play is done. That's where the climax belongs. In the story of the man who could save but one of the two women, your climax would come at the choice—about two-thirds of the way through unless you were careful, and so good workmanship should favor that development in which the woman the man loves tells him to save his wife and turns with a smile to face her own fate. If the story stopped right there, the climax would come at the end of the play, but if you used any of the other suggested developments your story would keep on for several scenes. Suppose that we took the development where, after all, the woman was saved and the wife died. That would give us the happy ending, but it would be an anti-climax, since it could not possibly be as strong a situation as the renunciation. The anti-climax is like eating a piece of bread and butter after you have had your rich pastry and dessert. The bread and butter is all right in its place, but the plum pudding and ice cream are the climax of the meal.

Do not plan for the comedy relief that in the drama is used to lighten the action. Two hours and a half of straight drama is rather too much without some distraction and so the comedy relief was introduced, but in photoplay the story runs but twenty minutes or less to the reel and there is no time to cumber the action with matter that does not directly advance the main action. More than this, the introduction of a comedy relief will be apt to detract from the dramatic effect. Even some unconsidered action may bring a laugh that will be fatal to the suspense. In photoplay it is not possible to make the audience alternately laugh and cry. It may be comedy or drama, but not both; the form is too simple to admit of complex treatment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## PUTTING IN THE PUNCH

What the punch is—the three sorts of dramatic punch—raising the commonplace to the dramatic—relation of punch to plot—the comedy punch.

It may be that someone will presently find a more expressive term than "punch" for that quality of the story that lifts it from the commonplace, but it is to be questioned. The word is simple, terse and highly descriptive. It is almost self-explanatory to the trained writer, and yet the question most frequently asked by the beginner is "What is the punch?"

Punch possesses a variety of synonyms. It is heart interest, grip; suspense and a dozen other things rolled into one. Like the small boy's definition of salt, it is what makes the story bad when it is left out. The story without the punch is like a motor boat without the motor, the gun without powder or shot. It looks all right at first glance but the kick is lacking.

Punch is that element of the story which gives it interest. It is dramatic situation, but it is more than that and it is because the word means so much that it is not easy to define.

If a man on the street should walk up to another and knock him down, the situation would not be without interest. If the person assaulted was the President of the United States and the man striking the blow the defeated candidate at the last election, the interest would be very greatly increased. The first assault might occupy two or three lines in the police court news of the local papers, but the fact that it was the President and his late rival who engaged in the row, would put the punch into the story and the facts would be telegraphed and cabled around the world. The American papers would give columns to the story, the San Francisco papers as well as those of New York and Boston, but the fact that Henry Hastings had had a fight with Samuel Belting would not attract much attention beyond their immediate circles of friends.

Every day people die or get married. In most cases it costs so much a line to announce the fact in the papers, but if the daughter of millions marries the title of centuries, pages are given to the affair in its every aspect from the family history of the long line of dukes to the sort of embroidery on the bride's corset covers. The punch has been put into the commonplace. The status of the contracting parties has raised the story to the point of general interest.

In one sense, then, the punch is that feature of a story which raises the story above the commonplace.

A tramp dies in the workhouse. The story is recorded only in the records of the Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Perhaps he dies in a vacant lot. The newspapers record that "The body of an unknown man, believed to have been a tramp, was found this morning in the vacant lot at the corner of Broad and Beech streets." The item is of more importance because one expects tramps to die in the workhouse, but few die in vacant lots.

But perhaps the tramp met death while making a gallant rescue at a fire. The story of the tramp's heroism becomes more important than the story of the fire, because his death is dramatic and the fire is not.

Suppose that instead of that the tramp's body was found in the cellar of a grocery store. In the other end of the cellar was stored the surplus stock but the tramp was too weak from illness to break open a box of crackers or reach the bottles of wine close to hand. He had died of hunger and thirst in the sight of food and drink. That is dramatic.

Take once more the cellar and the tramp. He has taken a little child under his protection and, too weak to go out and beg food, has died of starvation that the little child might live until help came.

The tramp dead in the workhouse is commonplace. The tramp dead in a vacant lot is unusual, the tramp saving the life of another at the cost of his own is heroic, the tramp dying of starvation in the sight of food is dramatic, the tramp dying that a little life might be spared is pathetic. In each story there is an increasing punch.

A man running for a train and losing it is generally regarded as something humorous by all save the man who misses the train. If losing the train means a sacrifice of a human life, the comedy is turned into the dramatic. If we know nothing of the fact that a life is dependent upon the catching of the train, the incident remains humorous to us. If we know, the situation is tragic. The presentation of this dramatic side in a forceful and striking manner puts in the punch.

The punch should suggest itself to the author simultaneously with the plot itself, because the plot is not good unless it has the punch. But lacking the punch we can add it afterward or having too weak a punch, we can intensify it through development.

Let us take the triangle again. Two men love the same girl and their efforts to win her forms the story. In the simplest form Frank Jones and Paul Smith love Mary Brown and are rivals for her hand. Frank finds the greater favor and wins her hand in marriage. There is a story there, but it lacks the punch because it tells only the commonplace and usual. It almost wholly lacks dramatic situation. But the punch can be added after the story has been devised and the punch can be built up to almost any degree required.

Suppose that Frank and Paul are brothers. This at once brings a dramatic element into the story. Frank is staid and steady going; Paul is wayward and inclined to dissipation, but like most black sheep, is his mother's idol. Paul declares that unless he can marry Mary he will go straight to the devil. Frank does not particularly care for that, for his brother has long since tested forbearance to the breaking point, but their mother is an invalid and Frank knows that Paul's lapse will break her heart. He gives up his suit and leaves the field clear to Paul. The story now has a punch, because it has become dramatic through the element of Frank's renunciation, but the story is by no means as strong as it may be made.

Disregard the relationship and once more they are Jones and Smith. This time it is Frank who is reckless and Paul, who is the steady one. Frank sees that Paul has the inside track and plans to trick him. He knows that Paul's father is short in his cash at the bank in which all three are employed. It is but a temporary shortage, a matter that amounts to little more than an unauthorized loan, but it is technically a criminal act and exposure would mean the old man's ruin and disgrace and that, in its turn would probably lead to his death.

Frank tells Paul of his father's situation and warns him that unless he abandons all claims to Mary's hand he will inform the bank directors of the facts. To save his father, Paul assents. The old man, knowing nothing of the situation, adds to Paul's anguish by urging him to press his suit more ardently.

Here we have a more dramatic situation. The first plot offers but one premise, that

(a) Frank and Paul desire to marry Mary.

The last development offers these facts:

- (a) Frank and Paul desire to marry Mary.
- (b) Frank has knowledge of Paul's father's indiscretions.
- (c) He uses this knowledge to dispose of his rival.
- (d) Paul's father, not knowing this, upbraids him for a laggard in love.

That is doing much better, but we have only started on our search for the punch. Paul knows of some grave reason why Frank should not marry Mary, yet he dares not use his knowledge to warn the woman he loves. To tell that Frank is addicted to the morphine habit will be to bring ruin and death to his father. Not to tell will bring lifelong misery to the girl.

Now let the old man know these facts about Frank as well as Paul and let him be eager to warn Mary himself since it seems that Paul will not. Paul knows that to tell him of his own knowledge of the affairs at the bank and of Frank's possession of the facts will be almost as bad as a general exposure. He seeks to prevent his father from telling Mary without giving his reasons why.

That is better, but there is more yet. The father determines to take the situation into his own hands. He starts for Mary's house. On the way he meets Frank. Frank guesses his errand and warns him that if he tells Mary he will do so at the cost of his own exposure.

The old man is badly shaken, but he argues that the happiness of Paul and Mary is of greater importance than his own short-lived happiness. No longer with hot eagerness, but with slow determined steps, the old man continues on his way while Frank goes in search of the President of the bank.

The duty done, the old man goes home and prepares for the suicide that will take him beyond the reach of human justice. He is writing a farewell note to Paul when the latter bursts into the room with the news that Frank was struck by an engine while crossing the railroad tracks. Here the story might stop, but there is one more possible development. Paul sees the letter of farewell and realizes the situation and the sacrifice that his father has made for him. The slight anger of the past few weeks vanishes. More than ever they are father and son.

Now from the simple start that two men want to marry the same girl, we have evolved these complications of the punch.

- (a) Frank and Paul desire to marry Mary.
- (b) Frank discovers the peculations.
- (c) Frank threatens Paul with the exposure of the father.
- (d) Paul renounces Mary for his father's sake.
- (e) The father quarrels with Paul over his failure to urge his suit.
- (f) Paul knows Frank to be a drug fiend but dares not tell.
- (g) The father discovers Frank's habit and urges Paul to tell.
- (h) He decides to warn the girl himself since Paul will not.
- (i) Frank discovers his purpose and threatens him with exposure.
- (j) For the sake of Paul and Mary, the old man persists in telling.

- (k) His preparations for the suicide.
- (l) The announcement of Frank's death.
- (m) The discovery by Paul of the letter and the reconciliation.

There is hardly a commonplace of life that cannot be raised in similar fashion to the story with the punch, but care must be used to provide natural and logical explanations of all incidents. The author cannot arbitrarily adopt a situation that does not belong to the story. It is not possible to drag in sensation to bolster up a weak plot. The strength must be the strength of the plot, not the strength of foreign matter interpolated into the story.

It should also be borne in mind that the punch does not necessarily mean violence. To the contrary it is seldom that the punch is attained though the introduction of violence and crime. Through its very nature the punch should be an appeal to the dramatic and not to the melodramatic.

Punch is a matter of mind rather than spectacle. If the crazed foreman ties the girl to a log and starts the gang saws because she will not marry him, we have put sensation, not punch into the story. If two men fight over a girl, there is no added punch to the story. We have increased the sensation, and sensation may enable the story to gain attention, but it will not have the grip that the story with the punch possesses, because the appeal is made to the eye and not the brain. The sight of two men fighting is stirring, but the thought behind the fight is what carries the punch if there is one. Punch and violence are not synonymous but wholly the reverse of each other.

The sight of the girl tied to a saw log with the saws running is thrilling, but the situation lacks the intensity that would be possessed by the situation if we knew that the foreman sat inside the mill with a gun on his lap ready to kill the girl the moment she appeared with her father's dinner and the punch was worked through the suspense of wondering whether the father, coming down another path, would meet the girl before she enters the mill.

The punch is mental; violence is physical.

In the comedy story the punch is brought about through the force with which the comedy idea is built up and driven home.

A good example of the double comedy punch is found in Auntie's Affinity. Auntie falls in love with a distinguished stranger whom we know to be the chef in the hotel in which she lives. The punch is found in the thought that the old lady does not know that he is a chef, because he has told her that he is a nobleman. We wonder what she will say when she finds out just what he is. She finds out and collapses. That is the punch. Then it turns out that the Chef really is a nobleman and a wealthy one at that but he has not yet come into the posses-

sion of the fortune to which he has fallen heir, and so it happens that he still works as a chef until the money comes. That is the second punch. There are two distinct comedy ideas in the one story.

Comedy should stand in less need of a pronounced punch since it is not dependent so much upon the idea for its interest save in the higher forms of story. In the dramatic story the punch is essential for much of the action is lacking in particular interest. In the comedy of the more farcical sorts the action itself is amusing and while the lack of idea cannot be excused, there is less need of a pronounced plot since the action amuses as it leads to the climax.

Let's write a new definition of punch that applies to comedy and drama alike.

Punch is the idea that lies back of the action and grips and holds the attention, raising the action out of the commonplace into the unusual.

That's the punch.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE CUT-BACK

**Value of the cut-back—used to stop gaps and cover breaks—  
used to maintain suspense—how to handle—the dramatic  
cut-back—the comedy cut-back.**

What the punch is to the mental side of the story the cut-back is to the physical or visual side. One gives intensity to the plot, the other heightens the suspense by intensifying the action.

Originally the cut-back was used to close up a gap in the action, to obviate the actual showing of a crime or to bridge a stoppage in the action, but while it is still much used in these connections, its greatest value lies in the fact that through its use the element of suspense may be very greatly heightened.

Used in the first manner the cut-back prevents what might otherwise be awkward situations. We have the heroine come to her rooms to change her dress. Nothing can develop until the change is made, but it is manifestly impossible to hold the action in her room until the change is made. To show her starting to make the change and then show her changed will give two scenes in succession in the same setting. These might be broken with a leader, but a cut-back would be better. We will suppose that Norma has had a quarrel with her father and rushes off to change her dress before she leaves home forever. We might handle it this way:

- 7- Norma's room- Norma enters, crying- starts to remove her dress.

Leader- Norma is ready to leave her father's home.

- 8- Back to No. 7- Norma is now dressed for street- she takes one last look about the room- exits.

It requires no great experience to realize that this is rather awkward. Here we have a scene following one of great strength; the quarrel with her father. She rushes off to her room to change her things and we are all wrought up over the matter. Then flashes an unimportant leader and the effect is much as though our spirits were dashed with cold water. The value of the situation has been lost through the leader. Compare the above with this development:

- 7- Norma's room- Norma enters, crying- starts to undress.

- 8- Back to No. 6- Flash of mother arguing unsuccessfully with father.

- 9- Back to No. 7- Norma dressed for street- takes last look at room- exits.

The flash of the room in which the quarrel occurred takes no more time than the leader would require, but now, instead of losing interest, the situation is the stronger because of that fleeting glimpse of the parents. It holds up the story and may even raise it a trifle instead of letting the action drop.

The same device may be used to get rid of a dinner scene. We cannot hold the action through the meal and the ten second dinner is unconvincing. We cut-back to some other action and when we get back to the dining room the meal is over.

In the same way holes may be dug, tents erected or anything done that would require more time than the film will permit.

To conceal crime, or rather to avoid showing the actual performance of a criminal act, the cut-back is invaluable. If it is a fight we may see the police hurrying to the rescue, if a murder the assassin draws his revolver. We see the wife of the murdered man peacefully engaged in household duties. We come back to the other scene and the man is dead. The deed has been committed. We have the full effect without having shown the actual commission of the crime.

In the same way there may be shown the burglar breaking into the house and the family roused by the noise and telephoning for

the police, the mother on her death bed while the son gambles and drinks in some bar-room, in short any parallel action in which one scene gains added strength through contrast with the other.

But it is as a means of creating suspense that the cut-back has been found to possess the greatest value. The suspense cut-back at once quickens the action and delays the climax. One example of the cut-back has been given in Chapter Six, but it is capable of being handled in many ways.

One familiar form is the drug clerk that dispenses poison in mistake for some harmless remedy. In straight action we would see the clerk discover his mistake and rush out, we see the messenger walking along the street. The clerk catches up with him and takes away the bottle. In three not particularly effective scenes the entire action has been played.

Cutting back we see the messenger and the clerk in alternate flashes. Now the boy is delayed and we think the clerk will catch him, now the delay falls to the clerk and the boy steals a ride on a truck, gaining a greater lead. The clerk appeals to an automobile, but in the next scene our hopes are dashed because we see the boy on the steps delivering the medicine. All of this time we have flashed between the boy and the clerk with perhaps a glimpse or two into the sick room. Now we alternate between the sick room and the clerk because the boy has become unimportant. The medicine is about to be administered when the clerk rushes in, just in the nick of time. Instead of three scenes perhaps twenty have been played and in all that time our nerves have been kept a-tingle.

The number of flashes to be used cannot be definitely stated since it varies with the story, but it is well not to give too many. Some directors will cut-back six times and others may take ten. It is better to write in the six and leave it to the director to add more if he desires them.

In figuring the cut-backs it should be remembered that it is not the number of scenes but their length which determines the full length of the reel. Ten five-second flashes take no more film than one fifty-second scene. Do not be frightened at the way the scene numbers pile up. Figure the length and be reassured.

Let us take one more dramatic example. Judson is the object of the insane hatred of Smith, a lunatic. Judson lives alone in a house far from the habitations of others. He is sick and without attendance, utterly helpless. Smith escapes from his keepers and heads straight for Judson's home. The keepers, knowing what is likely to happen, start in pursuit. At first the pursuit lies between Smith and the keepers. Once or twice there comes a flash of Jud-

son, to remind the spectator of the object of the chase, but the real interest lies between Smith and his keepers. Then Smith comes to the house. Fear lends strength to Judson. He hurls a bottle at Smith, stunning him. He then escapes into the woods, Smith rouses and pursues him. Now the interest lies between Judson, struggling through the brush and Smith, hot in pursuit, with now and then a flash of the keepers. It would be written something like this:

- 16- Asylum grounds- Smith and keeper enter scene- Smith watches his chance- fells keeper- exits.
- 17- Base of wall- Smith drops into scene from above- picks himself up- exits.
- 18- Road- Smith runs through.
- 19- Back to No. 16- Keeper revives- gives alarm- other keepers enter- all exit.
- 20- Woods- Smith runs through.
- 21- Same as No. 18- Keepers run through.
- 22- Judson's room, as in No. 11- Judson in bed helpless.
- 23- Woods- Smith runs through.
- 24- Woods- Keepers run through- one falls- badly hurt- others gather about him- he urges them to hurry on- they exit.
- 25- Woods- Smith runs into scene- stops to tie shoes- on again.
- 26- Woods- Keepers run through.
- 27- Exterior of Judson's, as in No. 9- Smith enters scene- enters house.
- 28- Woods- Keepers run through.
- 29- Judson's room, as in No. 11- Smith enters- approaches bed- Judson terror stricken- Smith turns to table- picks up revolver- Judson collects strength- rises- takes large bottle- throws.
- 30- Woods- Keepers run through.
- 31- Back to No. 29- Smith face down on table- Judson rises- staggers out.
- 32- Exterior of Judson's, as in No. 9- Judson staggers out of house- looks wildly about- staggers off.

- 33- Back to No. 29- Smith rouses- looks about him- looks at broken bottle and at empty bed- can guess- wild with rage- rushes out.
- 34- Woods- Judson enters scene- staggers on.
- 35- Front of Judson's, as in No. 9- Smith rushes out- picks up trail- follows.
- 36- Woods- Keepers run through.
- 37- Tangle of underbrush- Judson hides.
- 38- Woods- Smith following Judson's trail.
- 39- Back to No. 37- Smith enters scene- looks about him.
- 40- Judson's, as in No. 9- Keepers enter- rush into house.
- 41- Back to No. 39- Smith looks about him- passes out of scene.
- 42- Judson's room, as in No. 11- Keepers enter- look about them- exit.
- 43- Woods- Smith enters- can find no tracks- turns back.
- 44- Front of Judson's, as in No. 9- Keepers rush out- take up new trail.
- 45- Same as No. 41- Smith enters- looks about him- picks up trail- starts for brush.
- 45- Close-up of Judson cowering in brush.
- 46- Back to No. 44- Smith still approaching brush.
- 47- Woods- Keepers run through.
- 48- Back to No. 46- Smith aiming at brush with revolver.
- 49- Close-up- Judson waiting for shot.
- 50- Back to No. 48- Keepers rush in- seize and disarm Smith- Judson helped from brush- faints- carried out of scene- other keepers exit with Smith.

Study this development closely and you will note how the interest is held up.

Smith passes Judson's hiding place and you think that Judson is safe, but he turns and comes back again. Even with the revolver in his hand Smith does not fire. We have the close up of Judson to hold back the denouement a few seconds longer. Instead of three or four scenes we have thirty-five, but those thirty-

five will take but little more film than five regular scenes although it seems much longer because we have given the suggestion of so much happening.

Because the cut-back is valuable do not employ it in every drama you write. Many dramas are far better if played in fifteen scenes than in fifty. Use the cut-back only when there is need of it. Use it, do not abuse it.

In comedy the cut-back delays anticipation, but its greater service is in quickening the action, since here the element of suspense is not so greatly needed. Even when the cut-back is employed the handling is slightly different.

If Jones, a gay old boy, engages in a flirtation with some charming young woman and winds up by inviting her to lunch, the meal will be long drawn out and not very funny. If we cut back to Jones' wife in pursuit of her husband, we can save the bits of humor that the table scenes will bring and get other laughs from Mrs. Jones. Suppose that we try it something like this in the old way:

- 5- Exterior restaurant- May and Jones enter scene- enter restaurant.
- 6- Interior of restaurant- Jones and May enter- they are shown to table- waiter takes order.
- 7- Front of Jones' house, as in No. 3- Mrs. Jones enters from house- exits up street.
- 8- Restaurant, as in No. 5- Mrs. Jones enters scene- enters restaurant.
- 9- Interior, as in No. 6- Mrs. Jones enters- chases May out with umbrella- Jones dives under the table- she prods him out- drives him from restaurant.

That would be the old way of handling the situation. We get a mild laugh when Mrs. Jones starts out because we can guess what is coming. There is a better laugh in scene nine where we see it happen. That is about all we can get. Now compare this with what follows:

- 5- Exterior of restaurant- Jones and May enter scene- enter restaurant.
- 6- Restaurant interior- Jones and May enter- they are shown to table- waiter takes order.
- 7- Jones' house, as in No. 3- Mrs. Jones enters from house- exits up street.

- 8- Back to No. 8- May still ordering- Jones begins to look worried- waiter writing as fast as he can to keep up with order.
- 9- Street- Mrs. Jones enters- meets Mrs. Smith- Mrs. Smith tells her of having seen Jones with girl- Mrs. Jones hurries out.
- 10- Back to No. 8- Dishes all over table- May laughing and talking- emphasizes her points by pounding Jones on his bald spot with a turkey bone- Jones gets sentimental- tries to take her hand- she gives him the bone instead- he is disgusted.
- 11- Street- Mrs. Jones walks through rapidly- fight in her eyes.
- 12- Back to No. 10- Jones wants to kiss May.
- 13- Restaurant exterior, as in No. 5- Mrs. Jones enters scene- looks into window- starts.
- 14- Back to No. 12- Jones still trying to kiss May- she slips a piece of ice down his back.
- 15- Back to No. 13- Mrs. Jones leaves window- enters restaurant.
- 16- Back to No. 14- Mrs. Jones enters- they see her- May runs out- Jones dives under table.
- 17- Restaurant exterior, as in No. 5- May runs out- looks into window- "Poor Jones."
- 18- Back to No. 16- Mrs. Jones prods Jones out from under table with umbrella- starts to beat him.
- 19- Back to No. 17- May turns from window- exits laughing.
- 20- Back to No. 18- Other waiters help Jones' waiter to eject the pair.
- 21- Exterior of restaurant, as in No. 5- Jones and Mrs. Jones put out- they stand a moment- Jones' waiter comes with bill- Mrs. Jones threatens him with umbrella- he rushes into restaurant- Mrs. Jones lugs Jones off by collar.

What follows may be told in straight action, but by cutting back we get sixteen lively scenes instead of two long and three short ones without using much more film. All through this action there runs the suggestion that Nemesis is on Jones' trail in the shape of his wife and when expectation has been brought to the highest

point consistent with safety the expected happens. A couple more scenes might have tired and let the entire run of action fall flat.

It will be noted that in both of these examples the scene markings vary. This is purposely done to show that it is sufficient that the scenes are marked so as to be clearly understood by the director. In general, the restaurant scenes are all "back to" because the action is more or less continuous, while the exteriors are mostly "same as" because the stage is cleared, but a slight variation in the marking will not matter so that you make it clear.

It is needful to write carefully and with exactness, but if we say "Front of Judson's" in one scene and "Judson's house" in another, the director can tell what we mean and he will not refuse to purchase the script merely because we did not say "Front of Judson's" both times.

In using the comedy cut back be careful not to overdo. It will not stand as much as a drama and if the cut-back is developed to too great a length the play will be spoiled. In comedy it is necessary to get more movement to the action, not in the speed of the players, but in the movement from place to place. These scenes are practically the restaurant scene with cut backs to the street. We cannot stay long in the restaurant. We must move on to other places to gain variety.

It is well for the beginner to practice writing cut-backs without reference to the rest of the story. Keep working on cut-back incidents until you have learned the best modes of development, for the cut-back badly done is worse than straight action.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### VALUES AND EMPHASIS

The emphasis of action—of situation—of acting—through busts—emphasizing leaders in action—relative value of the players—placing scenes.

One of the important matters to which most writers, not all of them beginners, give far too little thought is the proper placing of the emphasis and the assignment of values.

In the spoken drama the actor speaks more slowly or more emphatically certain words or groups of words to which he wishes to attract particular attention because of their greater meaning than the general speech. In the printed book these extra-important words are emphasized by being printed in italics or small capitals. If the words are written a line is drawn under them.

In the action it is not possible to speak lines, to italicize or underscore, but the handling of the action of the story, the situation or through the individual acting, it is possible to produce precisely the same effect. Take this scene for example:

- 2- Lawn- Myra and Holbrook on- John enters- calls Myra- they exit.

In the first scene it was shown that John and Myra are man and wife. Played without emphasis, scene two would show that Myra is talking to Holbrook and John comes and tells her that it is time they should be going home. The scene means no more than if Myra had been talking to one of her women friends. It is no unusual thing for a woman at a garden party to talk to a man other than her husband. It is the commonplace.

But give that scene emphasis and at once it takes on a different aspect. What we really want to show by this scene is that Myra is more interested in Holbrook than a woman married to another has a right to be. To get the point over, emphasis must be given the fact. Write it this way:

- 2- Lawn- Myra and Holbrook close to camera- Holbrook is talking earnestly- Myra half eager, half reluctant to listen- Holbrook pleads his cause- John enters- stands in background a moment- they do not hear him- Holbrook tries to take Myra's hand- she gently resists- John comes forward- speaks- Myra and Holbrook turn and rise- John leads Myra off- at line Myra turns- looks back at Holbrook- he throws her a kiss- she frowns, then smiles- exits- Holbrook turns to camera with confident smile on face.

Now the scene will be full of meaning. We can see that Holbrook is trying to win Myra from her duty to her husband. She is attracted, but it is plain that she has not yet listened seriously to his pleas. John knows of Holbrook's efforts. We have written more action than should be given most scenes, but here we need greater detail because we are gaining our emphasis through the action. You must pass your idea along to the director more fully. Now that the fact is established, he will know in later scenes the attitude of the three leading characters toward each other, and will not need so much business, but this first scene must be emphasized.

In the same way you will emphasize the heroine's preference for one of two suitors. If she leaves one for the other gladly, she

is more fond of the newcomer. If she is sorry to be interrupted, her interests lie in the other direction. "John speaks, exits with Myra" means nothing much, but if you add that Myra shows impatience at the interruption or turns gladly to John, we know how John stands in her estimation.

Emphasis by situation gives us another means of driving home the story. Myra is perhaps rushing headlong to her fate. There is no reason why she should. For the purpose of the story it is necessary to hold the sympathy to John and to show that she is merely thoughtless, perhaps reckless, and is not driven to another man through her husband's coldness. We write in a short scene showing her happy home life and John's tenderness. Later on, when he tells her that she cannot have the child, we approve of his action for we remember that it is wholly her own fault that she ran away with Holbrook.

Emphasis by acting is the third means of getting direct emphasis. Rose has just rejected George's proposal of marriage. He leaves the house and he passes through the streets to his own home.

If he merely comes into the scene and walks through it there is not much to the action, but if he stops, presses his hand to his aching head and passes on, then we know that he feels very badly about the matter. Even a slowing down of the acting will bring emphasis.

Emphasis by means of bust pictures is merely directing particular attention to some action by showing an enlarged picture of this action at the moment of its happening, as was done in Chapter Six in the matter of the key.

Sometimes it is better to use the emphasis of action or acting in preference to the bust, which should be employed only when necessary. Suppose that Hugh wants to put some marked money into Frank's pocket through the aid of his accomplice, Vera. At the proper moment there might be flashed a bust of Frank's pocket with Vera's hands slipping the money into it. This is very much the same thing as when a newspaper prints a photograph and marks with a cross where the body was found or draws a circle around the thumbprint on the safe to call attention to the salient feature of the picture.

But in writing the picture we can get almost the same effect by writing the action this way:

Hugh still talking. Gradually forces Frank toward the front of the stage where Vera stands waiting-cautiously she slips the marked bills into his pocket and signals Hugh that this has been done.

In the story of the Count we could not bring him down front and so the bust was used, but here the characters can be moved down to the front line and there the action can be played clearly.

Emphasis of action may also be employed to give emphasis to the printed leader, since the visual fact, the fact in action, is so much more emphatic than the printed word. A leader may be required to state that Helen's father objects to Herbert because he wishes his daughter to marry a title, but when we see the fact on the screen, the meaning of the leader is driven home, so do not trust to the leader alone to carry the important announcement. Write in a short scene that emphasizes that. You cannot show the matter in the scene alone, but the scene forces on the memory the fact the leader contains.

Value has two aspects, the value of the character and the value of the scene or situation.

The value of the character depends upon the relation of that character to the story and its narration in action. The maid that merely brings her mistress' wraps when she wants to leave the house is of negative value. She is little more useful to the story than the table or chairs that dress the setting. But if she aids the love affairs of her mistress and the hero, finally arranging so that the girl can elope, then the maid becomes one of the leading characters.

Having a real value to the plot she should be early and properly identified. Show that she is devoted to her mistress and that she is regarded as something more than a mere automaton. Do this in the early scenes and then, when her services are needed, it does not become necessary to stop and offer an elaborate explanation as to why the girl should turn to her maid for assistance.

No character essential to the advancement of the plot should be introduced at the last moment. The detective who comes in to announce that he has discovered that the villain and not the hero killed Banker Kirkham should not be required to identify himself to the cast and to the audience in that scene. Earlier in the action write in a leader that the heroine consults the detective and then show in a scene who the detective is. Then when he suddenly comes into the last scene and points out the villain as the real criminal, we know who he is. It is not necessary to halt the action while he points to his badge and to the heroine to show who he is and who employed him.

Each time a new character comes upon the screen there is a certain relaxation in the mental grip on the plot while the identity of the newcomer is determined. Take advantage of that lapse to get the introduction over with and then, when the essential action

comes, there is no drop in the interest, no matter how momentary. Get all the introductions over within the first third of the action. The butler who ushers the detective in does not have to be introduced, but the detective must be known to the audience and ten feet in front of the climax is not the proper place for the introduction.

It should be found that not more than four or five characters are of real value to the plot. Keep your action to those as much as possible. From the nature of things you must have a hero, a villain and a heroine. The villain does not have to be a man steeped in crime to deserve the name. He may be of as good a moral character as the hero himself, but if he is the man who interposes the obstacles in the hero's path, the man who makes possible the element of struggle without which no play is considered complete, then he is the villain.

Perhaps he may only be the other suitor to the heroine's hand, the man who keeps the hero from sailing right in and getting the right to buy the engagement ring. That doesn't sound like an act of villainy, but it is, technically, if not in fact.

We have, then, these three leading characters. There may be twenty people helping the villain, but they are all of less value than the villain because they merely espouse his cause. The hero may have fifty adherents, but not one of them can equal him in value. They are all important to the story in greater or less degree, but they are not as important to the story as these three.

Suppose that you ask for a glass of water and a servant brings it to you on a tray. The glass, the tray and the servant all figure in the action, but the thing of value is the water, which you have asked for. The other objects are all less important to you than the water, and yet without the glass you could not have had the water and without the servant you would not have had the glass.

The policeman who arrests the villain in the last scene is not important. The arrest is the important matter and he is merely the means to the end. It is not necessary to identify him, but it is necessary to show as quickly as possible the leading characters, their relation to each other and, to some extent, their relation to the play.

Having the sense of values will enable the author to plan his scenes intelligently. Each scene should advance the story one point and should be given place and length in proportion to its value.

It might seem to the beginner at first glance that there can be but one place for a scene and that must be its proper place. He has been told, moreover, that all happenings should be shown in their chronological order and he cannot understand why there

should be a proper place, since there is but one place where the scene will fit in its chronological order.

He doesn't stop to realize that there are many things that might happen ten minutes before another action or two weeks later without in the least affecting the story. The villain has to slip the marked bills into the hero's pocket before he can accuse him of theft, but he might have arrived at that determination after the hero knocked him down for trying to kiss the heroine or after the scene in which he reads a letter from his lawyer telling him that his creditors are trying to make trouble and will do so unless he marries the rich heroine and pays his bills.

It may seem that there is no choice of position, since the result is the same, but again the reasoning is mistaken. If the decision to get the hero into trouble follows the blow it is a crime of revenge. If it follows the lawyer's letter it is a crime of greed.

In the same way, after the hero is thrown into jail we have a short scene of the villain gloating over his triumph and another showing the heroine in despair. It may not seem to make any difference which comes first, but a little thought will bring a different answer. It is our purpose to make the hero and heroine loved and the villain hated. We are sorry enough for the heroine, because we just saw her sweetheart carried off to jail. If we show her first and then the villain, her scene will add strength to his because we have fresh in memory the pitiful spectacle of her tears to inflame afresh our resentment against the villain.

We may show that the husband suspects his wife of wrongdoing and then run a scene that proves her innocent, but if we first proved the wife innocent and then showed the false charge we should gain far greater sympathy for the wife. If we want the sympathy we reverse the scenes. If we want sympathy to go to the husband, we tell of the innocence in a leader without action.

A photoplay is not a greater or less number of typewritten words. It is the best and most complete assembling of certain germane facts in their proper order. It is as nice a study as the technique of the stage and is as exacting when properly done. If you would write a really good photoplay first ascertain the value of each character and scene, then place each scene and use each character in such a fashion that each gives as much assistance to other scenes and characters as possible.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE DRAMATIC STORY

Easier than comedy to most persons—crime and violence not in themselves dramatic—death not always dramatic—heart interest makes the strongest appeal—things to avoid.

It would seem that most beginners start in with comedy stories with the idea of working over to the dramatic play when they have had a little more experience. This is a mistake, for of the two the dramatic play is more apt to bring results for the reason that the story may carry faulty dramatic construction where comedy requires a more exact technical development.

If they do start with the drama, they try to write "strong" stories, and jumble crime, violence, murder and sudden death into a horrible hodge podge of plotless nothing. They aim at the tragic rather than the happy ending and seem to think that if they cram enough sensational incident into their story, the fact that it has little or no plot will be overlooked.

Until literary judgment is formed, the supposedly strong story makes the greater appeal to the writer and in that stage of progress he is apt to write what he wants rather than what he should.

The really dramatic moment is not the result of an act of violence, but the idea back of the act. It is this fact that gives value to the cut-back when used in a dramatic story. You do not fear the crime. You fear that the crime will be committed.

There is nothing particularly dramatic in the sight of a man standing on the edge of a cliff. Thousands of men have stood on the edges of hundreds of cliffs and nothing has happened. There is nothing dramatic in that.

But suppose that we know that the villain has undermined that particular part of the cliff so that the removal of a single prop will cause tons of earth to fall down the steep, carrying the hero along. At once the situation becomes dramatic, not because anything *has* happened to the man standing there but because something *may*.

Within certain limits we grow more apprehensive for the hero's safety as the moments pass. The strain of waiting tells on us,

and this strain is greater—and therefore more dramatic—than if we sat watching a fist fight or a duel with knives between the hero and the villain. That would be exciting for the moment, but there would not be the nervous strain that would be induced by the long, tense wait for the moment we think must come. The fight is exciting and mildly dramatic, but the hero is supposed to have an even chance with the villain and the outcome is in doubt, but there is apparently but one outcome of the cliff episode. We can only wait with nerves at a tension for the end to come. That is truly dramatic. Through the use of cut-backs, as already explained, the finish is delayed while the situation grows in tensity, but we must first have the dramatic idea to work with, and the dramatic idea is seldom, if ever, the actual crime or the act of physical violence.

Two men, each carrying a revolver, enter a deserted shack. A shot is heard, or smoke floats out. There is a moment of inaction. Which man, if either, will come from that door when it again swings open? Two went in. Both cannot return; perhaps both are dead and the door will not be opened save by someone from the outside. There is a far greater dramatic value in that moment than if the entire details of a duel should be played before our eyes. The anticipation of evil is far more dramatic than the sight of evil. Suggest rather than show crime if you would be truly dramatic.

Death is seldom dramatic. It is even capable of being turned to farce if overdone. One of the funniest stories that was ever screened ended with the suicide of the sole remaining member of the cast. All the others had been murdered. It was meant by producer and author alike to be tremendously sensational, but there is but a short step from the ultrasensational to the travesty of sensation.

Death in itself is not dramatic, but the manner of death may be, though it is far more likely that the dramatic will come not from the death or the manner of that death so much as from the effect that death will have upon the living.

John kills Jim. The fact that he does so is not dramatic. It is the effect that Jim's death has on John's life that makes for drama. If he had not become a murderer John would have lived on a sober and desirable citizen, but the blow is struck and Jim lies lifeless at John's feet. In an instant John's whole life has changed. Not only that but the lives of his wife, his children, his parents and his friends are affected in lesser degree. John becomes a fugitive from justice. Nell, his wife, is left to support herself and her two children. Sam seeks to take advantage of

her helplessness to tempt her from virtue. Her struggles to repulse his advances and remain true to her better self are far more dramatic than the fact that Jim is dead. It will make a better and more dramatic story, probably, than the escape of John, though to the beginner it would seem that the only development from the incident of the murder would be the escape of John and his subsequent wanderings.

Both might make good stories, but you will find a more certain sympathy for the innocent wife than for the escaping murderer, no matter how great may be his provocation.

Crime is not in itself interesting. There is nothing dramatic or gripping in the theft of a watch or a thousand dollars. If the story of a crime interests, it is not because of the crime but because of some other factor of the story. The Sherlock Holmes stories are not interesting because they are the stories of crime and its detection. They are interesting because of the adroit manner in which the crimes are planned and the ingenuity shown in their detection. We admire the cleverness of the detective and his opponents rather than in the facts of the crime. To write the story of crime is almost to confess oneself lacking in inventiveness. Unless you can write a story to equal the work of Conan Doyle, you are either imitating that style or else not even a weak imitation.

Look back on the performances that you have seen. Trace them as far back as you can remember. Which stories have lasted longest in your memory? What plays of last year can you vividly recall? Are they stories that depended purely on crime for their incentive, or were they stories in which the crime was merely incidental to the story or else wholly wanting? If you have the normal mind you will be surprised to find how few stories you can remember that drew their greater interest from acts of violence. You remember parts of them in a hazy way, but the story that made the strongest impression was that in which the appeal was made to your head and heart, not to your craving for momentary excitement.

In other words, the heart interest story made the strongest and most lasting impression. Why not train yourself to write heart interest stories, too?

But do not confuse heart interest with love interest. Heart interest is an appeal to the generous emotions, not the relation of a romance. Instead of making your appeal with surprise and shock; instead of dealing with vice and crime, you make your points by drawing such gentle, lovable characters that their almost commonplace adventures are made graphic and interesting.

Take, for an example, a widow who is trying to send her son through college. It is almost an obsession with her. She wants to have her boy enjoy the advantages that her husband lacked. She wants to give him the chance that is his heritage.

She saves and scrapes that expenses may be met. The boy tries to help by working his way, but he is sensitive. He lacks push because he fears rebuff and he keeps so closely within himself that he loses the opportunities for earning money that might otherwise fall his way. He is out of touch with his classmates and his college, partly because he is too timid to seek to get in touch and partly because he does not interest his fellows with his colorless personality.

The mother pictures to herself the social as well as the educational advantages. As she plies the needle with her stiff, rheumatic fingers, she loves to think of her boy on the campus, one of his class. She figures him as a sort of college hero, and because he knows that is her dream, his letters keep up her delusion.

The boy writes home that he must have a new suit. His old will not last much longer. There is no money for clothes. She remembers that once, in sport, the lad had dressed himself in the clothes that had been his father's wedding suit. The coat nearly fitted, but the trousers were far too long.

All these years she had kept that suit beside her wedding dress that is to be her shroud. She had hoped to keep it, but the boy's need outweighs sentiment. She gets a pair of his own old trousers and cuts down the others to match.

The suit comes. The quaintly old fashioned coat is bad enough, but the trousers do not reach the boot tops. She had forgotten that he had stretched up in the three years since he has worn out the other pair. He doesn't write home his disappointment, though in his first moments of despair and anger he is tempted to do so. Her innocent pride in the letters from him will not let him write the truth. He makes the old suit do as long as he can, but at length the day comes that he cannot wear it longer. With hot anger and shame mingling in his heart he puts on the old suit and faces the campus.

His oddity of manner has caused him to be let alone, but now it makes the case all the worse. His classmates and the men of the other classes unite in laughter at the suit. Half blinded with tears of anger and of mortification he rushes off to his room.

And in that moment comes his mother. A friend has brought her to town in an automobile, knowing her desire to see her boy, and has dropped her at the campus while he goes about his business affairs. She wears her best, but her best is poor, and this

ridiculous old lady asking for the man in the funny clothes is the final touch of humor. A crowd of the students quietly follow her up the stairs to listen at the door.

The son, in the anger of the moment, turns on her. In the rush of shame and misery he lays his whole heart bare, tearing down the air castles that have been years in building.

Then the old woman speaks, not in reproach but in explanation. She tells of all her struggles to keep him going, she shows her hands, gnarled and knotted with toil. She shows the Gethsemane of her own narrow life.

And all the time the crowd at the door grows more sober. They had come to see the fun. Now they cannot leave. At last the captain of the crew rouses himself and enters the room followed by the others. He does not give the son money for a suit of clothes; that would be charity. But he does take the boy into the fellowship of the class of the college. He makes him one of them and there is the unspoken promise that he will be shown the ways by which the poorer students may earn their way through college. The old lady leaves and the whole class gallantly and reverently escorts her to the waiting car.

Is not that story more gripping in its appeal than the story of the man who shoots his best friend, takes to the hills and meets death behind a rock standing off a sheriff's posse? For that matter doesn't it make more of an appeal than its western complement that has been filmed several times: the story of the lad who has turned murderer or thief. His mother comes West and while she stays the men hide his real character and force him to keep straight that she may not be undervalued. It will take more skill to develop a plot like that correctly, but it will make a story better worth while.

Because a story is simple as to plot it does not necessarily follow that it is more easy to write. You can make more noise with a brass band than with a grand piano, but sometimes the pianist is a greater musician than the men of the band and evokes more wonderful harmonies.

In the crime story the incidents will generally carry the characters, but in the heart interest story the characters must carry the play. In other words the crime story with its rush of incident will be so exciting for the moment that the lack of real story will not be noticed, but the heart interest story seems real because you have made the people real; so real that their doings interest us.

Mother love is perhaps the strongest appeal of all, but it must be a genuine appeal, a real story of mother love, not merely the dragging into a weak story of a mother to save a worthless plot.

Patriotism comes next, then love of home, but patriotism is not represented by a wildly waving American flag.

The romance, or love story is next to the crime story, the theme most often attempted. All the world loves a lover and his lass, and almost any love story with a decently novel idea will find a welcome, but there are certain love stories that are so very common the author will find it best to leave them alone.

Out of every hundred love stories written, probably ten are written around an elopement. Five more are written around the overcoming of parental objection and fully twenty-five—a quarter of the entire output—are what Hal Reid has tersely compressed into "They love, they quarrel, they are reconciled." Unless the quarrel and its sequel differ from the usual run, it is better to leave these to others and strike out along more original lines.

This would seem to be equivalent to saying that love stories should be left severely alone. This is not so. Write love stories, by all means, for there is a steady market for them, but seek to give some brand new twist to plot or development if you would make sales.

Suppose that we take the "Modern Cinderella" idea. The girl loses her slipper and a man falls in love first with the slipper and then the owner. This is a master plot that has been used dozens of times and not always with much originality to the touches. Let us see if we cannot twist it around.

Nell loses her slipper. It falls on the fire escape below and it is found by a young man who occupies that apartment with his mother. He falls in love with the slipper and its owner and sets it back on the fire escape as a bait for the owner.

Then he is called to the telephone and as he rushes back the slipper is gone—but he can see the janitor's feet ascending the iron ladder. He haunts the front steps and eyes the footwear of every woman passing in or out. At last he sees the slipper again. To his surprise he is not the least bit in love with the owner, but there was a girl he saw who has captured his fancy. He wins her love. Then he tells the story of the slipper and she confesses that it was hers but that after the loss of one and its recovery she gave the pair to her maid. He found the right girl after all.

It will be well to leave the stories of deep passion alone until increasing technical equipment will permit you to handle them properly. There is but a small chance that the novice will be able to handle the incidents of intense passion without becoming foolish when most desirous of being impressive.

Purpose plays should be left severely alone. By purpose play is meant a story that in the guise of romance or drama presents some argument in favor of public movement. The Edison series

of tuberculosis plays are purpose plays as is that interesting comedy that argues that unless you brush your teeth twice a day and go to the dentist twice a year you will be sure to have tooth-ache and get mad and break up housekeeping. If you can get an order for such a story and possess sufficient knowledge to handle your subject intelligently, it is proper to write them. You will not need this advice, but the general writer should understand that these plays are not used because they are written. They are written to order for use by some certain company.

Avoid the controversial and propaganda stories. In other words, do not seek to air your fads in film. If you do or do not approve of Christian Science, the vote for women, or are for or opposed to secret societies, cults or sects, parties or movements, faith or fads, do not air your views. They will not interest others as much as they do you and the maker of films seeks to avoid giving offense to anyone. You may write a clever story because you are particularly interested in your subject, but there is no reason why the film manufacturer should "take sides," and the probabilities are that he will not.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE COMEDY STORY

**Difficult to write—idea and action must both be humorous—developing the idea in comedy action—avoid ridicule—personal afflictions not comedy material.**

Few writers, even those well advanced, appear to realize that it is more difficult to write good comedy than good dramas. It seems so simple a thing to throw together a few funny situations, that there is placed on the market a flood of worthless scripts, mere incidents as the first book agent story in Chapter Eight, or influence stories.

Back in the dark days of motion picture comedy, when incident was considered sufficient by producers who knew no better, there were produced a vast number of comedies of a general resemblance. A professor invented a pill or a potion or a magic wand that would cause people to sing or cry, to dance, or to kiss each other, or whatever it might be. This continued for several hundred feet and then the victims would turn on the savant, and, after a chase, would duck him in the pond or beat him up as might be most convenient.

Failing an influence, there would be the incident story in which Mr. Buttin or Mrs. Nosey went from place to place meddling with other person's affairs and always getting the worst of it, or there was the frankly chase picture. A baseball was batted out of a picture and for the rest of the film, it went upstairs and down-stairs, climbed fences and trees and did all sorts of impossible things while the actors rushed through the scene in a mad chase, overturning animate and inanimate objects and perpetually falling over fences, other obstacles and each other.

Such things once formed the bulk of the comedy production and still would be regarded as humorous by quite a large percentage of photoplay adherents, but there exists, on the other hand, a well defined demand for something better and the European market will not absorb the chase picture nor will it take much incident comedy.

Today the photo-comedy must be a comedy idea told in humorous action. In the stage comedies the idea is exploited through humorous situation and cleverly written lines. In photoplay we may have the situations, but lacking the dialogue, something must be found in its place. Since action takes the place of dialogue in photoplay, it follows that in the action must be found this missing element of comedy dialogue. In the stage comedy it is the dialogue that keeps the audience laughing, in the photo-comedy, the funny action must keep things going while the comedy idea is unfolded.

And mind you, the action must be *funny* not merely grotesque. A man slipping on a banana peel may be funny of itself to some minds, but if the man in falling trips up the stern father who pursues the eloping lovers, the action is funny to all because it leads to something. It is no longer an isolated act; it has become a part of the story.

There is this difference between comedy and drama that creates the differing conditions. In drama the story is strong and absorbing. It starts from a definite point and if properly written at once claims the interest of the spectator. Each action advances the story toward the climax and so the suspense is maintained. In comedy the climax is merely a joke. It lacks the grip of the big dramatic idea, and so the path from the start to the exposition of the climax joke must be made interesting through the comedy of action.

As has been said in an earlier chapter, the comedy script does not have to be funny in itself; indeed, the script that reads humorously is justly regarded with suspicion by the editor, for it is almost always found that the humor has been put into the script instead of in the action. The point aimed at is a story that

shall be amusing through the action and idea. The script is merely the description of the action through which the idea is conveyed. In appraising the offering the Editor reads the words but he sees the action. He will not appreciate the jest in the written script. He wants to see it in the action. Therefore do not labor to make the script read cleverly; devote your energies and inventiveness to making the action amusing.

The simplest rule is to give the audience something funny to think about and give it to them in action that is, of itself, funny. Once the trick is caught—and it is largely a trick—this is a comparatively simple matter to one with a natural sense of humor, but the disposition to lightly regard the production of a comedy has resulted in the writing of thousands of utterly useless scripts. The writer feels assured that his idea is stronger and more appealing than much that he sees on the screen and he cannot understand why his brilliant script is rejected in favor of one less funny. The answer almost always is that the script accepted and produced has both the comedy of idea and action where the disappointed author has either written the idea or the action, but not both.

Perhaps the simplest explanation may be found in such humorous cartoons as the Mutt and Jeff series. The pictures of Mutt and Jeff in varying poses are of themselves amusing and the series of six or eight poses may convey a suggestion of comedy story, but the greater appeal is made in the dialogue with which each picture is supplied. It is the *idea* back of the pictures that makes the pictures themselves funny, and not the pictures that give the humor to the idea. The dialogue alone would not be so appealing nor would the pictures without dialogue seem as amusing. It is the combination of the two that brings the fullest effect, so give the idea for the brain and the action for the eye and the most effective combination is produced.

Suppose that we take the old variety afterpiece, Bibbs and Bibbs, better known to the present generation of theatergoers as An Uptown Flat. The idea is that two brothers share the same apartment each with his own domestic establishment, but sharing the common rooms. The wife of one is strong minded and that brother is badly henpecked. The other brother is the dominant character on his side of the house and he browbeats his wife. The assertive brother takes the other out and gets him drunk in the hope of bringing a change in his domestic relations. In the meantime the assertive wife induces her sister-in-law to get the whip hand of her husband. The curtain falls on the situation turned around.

From this master plot have been written scores of photoplays in which the henpecked husband asserts himself in the last few scenes and a few in which the wife changes the situation. There is mild humor in the scenes in which the husband is bullied and a strong laugh at the finish. Much more can be gotten out of the idea with a proper development.

Suppose that Mrs. Smith is not only the head of her household, but shows a disposition to take charge of the affairs of the entire neighborhood. She gets into a quarrel with Jones. He cannot thrash Mrs. Smith and it would be a poor satisfaction to add to the sorrows of Smith himself. Jones conceives the plan of helping Smith to regain his rights and at the same time avenge the Jones' wrongs. He gets hold of Smith, coaxes him into the belief that he can run his household. To his surprise and delight Smith finds that he can. There we have the elements of a story that contains a larger idea than the original plot of Smith turning in sheer desperation. There is more to think about and, if properly told, there is more to laugh at.

But even more can be done with the story. Mrs. Smith knows that she has her enemy Jones to thank for the domestic upheaval. She sends for her mother; a mistress of strategy. Mother not only reduces Smith to proper subjection, but she persuades meek little Mrs. Jones that she has rights and in the end Jones and Smith are companions in misery. It requires no depth of insight to perceive that this idea is twice as amusing because there is twice as much idea.

But in writing the plot of action be careful that the action itself is rightly planned. Do not, for instance, write:

9- Street- Jones meets Smith and persuades him to defy his wife.

Such a scene would merely show two men talking to each other. A leader might tell what the subject of the conversation was and thus supply the comedy of idea, but the comedy of action would still be lacking. It will be necessary to supply humorous action. Suppose that Jones arranges with a prize fighter to permit Smith to knock him out and so give Smith the moral courage he needs. This will add a trifle to the humor of the idea and very decidedly to the humor of the action. There would be more space required, a few more feet of film, but in return for that extra length we would gain in the action. Suppose it to be played something like this:

- 9- Gymnasium- Instructor on- Jones enters- speaks to Instructor- explains- indicates about Smith's height- passes money- illustrates a knockout- hits Instructor- Instructor shows he understands- knocks Jones down- "That it?"- "Yes!"- Instructor pretends to apologize- Jones says it's all right- exits- Instructor laughs.
- Leader- Jones persuades Smith to assert himself.
- 10- Street- Jones and Smith meet- Smith has black eye- Jones pretends sympathy- secretly laughs- Smith registers that he got it splitting kindlings- Jones refuses to believe- argues- leads Smith off.
- 11- Gymnasium as in No. 9- Instructor on- Jones leads Smith in- Smith timid- Jones jollies him- winks at Instructor- makes Smith put on gloves- Smith boxes with Instructor- very much afraid- Instructor takes first chance to lie down and take the count- Jones congratulates Smith- Smith swaggers- playfully leads at Jones- knocks him out- Instructor rises- helps Jones up- Jones sore- wants to hit Smith- Instructor prevents him- takes gloves from Smith- they exit- Smith trying to walk like a tough.

Now we have replaced a mere conversation with action that amuses. There are two strong laughs in nine and eleven where the knockouts come and a lot of smaller ones that are not actually written in but which will suggest themselves to the director. We have written in the big laughs because these are important, but we have let alone the minor matters because the run of action will suggest these to the competent director and the incompetent will see nothing at best.

It is well to try for one big laugh in each scene. Here there are the knockouts in the gymnasium scenes and the black eye in the street scene. It may not be possible to bring laughs into the first two or three scenes of a comedy, because here we have to get the story started and there may be one or two explanations to be made that are more important for the moment than comedy actions, but as soon as the proposition is advanced there should be at least one laugh in every scene in a farce. In polite comedy, in which the humor of idea exceeds the humor of action, there is less demand for comedy action since there is a stronger story to carry the interest along, but even in polite comedy it is possible to keep the laughs going and this should be done.

And it will be well to note that while the minor laughs do not need to be written in, the big laughs must be clearly indicated. It is not sufficient to write that "John says good-bye in a funny manner." Tell what it is that makes the farewell humorous. Say

that "John lifts his hat—strikes his elbow against gate post—hat flies out of hand—he stoops to recover it—stumbles—fall on hat." Now the director will know what that "funny manner" is.

The director is not hired to do your thinking for you. He is paid to produce what you have thought out.

But all comedy action must be backed up by the idea. If John is particularly anxious to make a good impression on the girl he is bidding good-bye to; if he is particularly anxious to be elegant, his failure to gain the effect makes the merely mechanical business really funny. Some few persons will laugh at the crushed hat. More will discover the humor in the failure of the attempt, in the reduction of his pompous vanity.

If we see that George, visiting his sweetheart in the suburbs, has lost his pocket book and must walk all the way home, we are inclined to be sorry for George. But, if after the visit, he drops into a saloon and gets into a game of poker, being cleaned out and then refused car-fare, we are not sorry for him because it is entirely his own fault.

The best comedy is good natured. Aim to have your audience laugh *with* your characters, rather than *at* them. Avoid ridiculing physical afflictions. A woman with a hair lip may be amusing to you, but it will not entertain the man or woman with a similar infirmity, or whose relative or dear friend is so afflicted. This is equally true of lameness, blindness or any other bodily affliction and true in a greater degree of any story burlesquing religion, or some particular religious belief, and race, party sect or faith.

Not alone because of various censorships, but because of decency and good taste, do not base your comedies on violations of the moral or civil laws. The story of a mild flirtation is amusing if the flirtation is not carried too far and the flirt receives his just deserts, but you cannot base a real comedy on adultery or unchastity and a story in which the humor is derived from the success of a swindling scheme will not pass the Editors, let alone the censorships, unless the moral is rightly applied.

Death is not comedy material in any circumstance. Such few comedies as have been produced with death or the suggestion of death as a foundation have failed to win success. Of course there are exceptions to this rule but they are few.

We will suppose that it is known through the neighborhood that Pat Murphy is very ill. His death is momentarily looked for. But Pat is getting better, so much better that he gets out of bed and beats his wife. The neighbors hear her lamentations and word is spread through the neighborhood that Pat is dead. The neighbors come with flowers and condolences, only to be driven from the door by Pat himself.

This would not be very funny, but it would not be gruesome. But suppose that Pat, to fool the installment collector, pretends to be dead. The crape is displayed on the door, the undertaker comes and measures Pat and when the installment man comes he is reminded that the company gives the remaining payments to the widow. He goes away and Pat rises from the dead to express his joy.

Here is death and the suggestion of death. It may possibly be amusing to the unthinking, but it may remind hundreds of persons of a more or less recent bereavement and bring tears instead of laughs.

Most Editors will not consider a comedy with a death and it will scarcely pay to write for those few who may.

Comedies, based on overindulgence, should be avoided. The use of spirits should be handled with care. A mild case of exhilaration, such as Smith has in the book agent story, may pass, but a pronounced case of intoxication is disgusting to most persons no matter how much your appreciation of the story may blind you to the actual condition. Remember that the visual presentation of the offensive is infinitely worse than the written treatment and that you are writing something to be seen; not merely to be read.

Comedies in which children or animals are abused are not comedies at all. Resentment at the treatment of the helpless child or dumb brute will far outweigh the highest possible comedy value of such a scene or others connected with it.

It is a mistake to try and turn the familiar old jokes into comedies. Most of these are known to the Editor and if he wants them he will write them himself. Three productions of the man who was thrust into the ball room without his trousers when he thought he was going to an ante-room have been made in so short a space as a year, but each time those in a position to know have found that the story was written by the Editor because comedy ideas were scarce and a script had to be done at once.

It is all right for the Editor to write this stuff because he is not offering it as his own idea. You are supposed to offer only original matter and if you send in something like that it will be argued that if you will steal these commonplace ideas and offer them as your own you will assuredly steal less well known stories and possibly get the studio into trouble with the copyright laws. It is possible that you may succeed in selling one of these stories to some editor who had never heard that particular story, but if you do you may be assured that on its production at least one and possibly hundreds will write the studio, commenting on

the idea. This is true of the studio-made story as well as the outside product, but the studio story is known to be old. You are paid because it is supposed that you have offered something new.

It is essential that comedy be quick moving. The slow, deliberate action of the dramatic story is not possible. There should be no scene longer than thirty feet. If you cannot avoid having a longer scene, break it into two or more parts with cut-backs. The story that drags; that moves slowly either in narrative or action, will not score a success. Where twenty to forty scenes constitute the average full reel drama, the same number may be used for a half reel comedy because the action plays so much faster and there is need of active movement to the scenes as well as players. Polite comedy is played more slowly than the farce comedy or farce.

It is well to keep in mind that comedy does not make the impression on an audience that drama does, therefore, to spend large sums of money in obtaining some special effects would be impolitic. The comedy is supposed to be able to "carry itself" through its entertaining qualities and not need the aid of strong "effects." Plan your comedies for a simple and inexpensive production.

A manufacturer may spend several thousand dollars for special production of a drama, but a comedy should cost but little more than the salary list of those regularly employed, because added money seldom makes return in added effect.

As a general thing the comedy script runs fuller than that of a dramatic story, because in comedy the action is almost as important as the story it tells, but at the same time care should be taken not to overwrite and a study of condensation will enable the author to write as briefly as for drama without slighting the laughs.

Avoid the topical comedy dealing with the affairs of the moment. Long before you can get your script into a studio the Editor will have had one written if he wants one, but as a rule such stories are avoided unless the appeal is international.

The new slang phrase, the heat of a political battle, the passing fad of fashion or occupation may all suggest a capital story to you, but such stories are not of widespread interest, they may not even appeal to the entire United States, to say nothing of Europe, and so baseball, for instance, is seldom used as a theme since the English prefer cricket and France and Germany care for neither.

Stick to the idea that will be as good a year from now and it is today and that will appeal equally to the audiences in Bombay and Boston and you have a story that is likely to sell.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE TRICK PICTURE

Limited demand for the trick picture story—basis of trick work—stop camera—back turning—accelerated speed—double exposure—double printing.

The trick picture as such is in such slight demand that it will not pay to write this class of stories except on a positive order. Trick work is both tedious and expensive and unless exceptionally well done is not in great demand. An idea of how trick work is done will help the author to understand how certain effects may be gained in straight dramatic stories, but it should be understood that this chapter is for the information of the author and not to enable him to explain to the director how the effect may be gained.

There is a common belief that "anything is possible to the camera through trick work" and that statement is entirely true, but it should be qualified by the additional fact that many of these trick methods will give a cost far in excess of the benefit of the effect gained, and so, while the effect is possible, it is not practicable to do the trick work required.

The basis of most trick work is *stop camera, double exposure, double printing trick turning, or stopping down*.

Stop camera is just what the term implies, a stoppage of the camera. For this a special gear is used, giving one picture to every turn of the crank. This makes it possible to take but a single picture and yet be certain that the lense is covered, which is not possible where the usual sixteen to the second handle is employed. Some cameras use the four to one, attachment, which means that one picture is taken at the regular speed every quarter second.

This device is employed where the familiar doll drama is used in which dolls seem to perform the actions of the drama instead of players of flesh and blood. After each exposure the positions of the hands and legs are changed in the same degree that a film shows the limbs of regular players to move. If it takes four frames to show the downward movement of an arm, it requires four exposures and four changes to get the same effect with the doll. When the film is run off the action appears continuous.

though the action in a five hundred foot picture may have required months of care.

Stop camera, but with the regular attachment, is also used to produce sudden apparitions, or to exchange dummies for real players. We will suppose that a character has been thrown from a cliff or an upper window. The upper window in the scene, is set on the stage floor and the drop is less than three feet, but going outside the building selected for the other half of the fall, a dummy is dropped into the scene, dressed to represent the actor playing the part. The camera is stopped, the position of the dummy noted accurately and while the dummy is removed the actor takes its place as nearly as possible. The camera is started again and the action is continued. If the substitution has been deftly made, the effect is startlingly real.

If players are on the scene, the director cries "Hold!" and at the warning they remain in the exact position they have assumed and maintain that until the command is given to resume when the incompletely action is finished.

This also permits the substitution or removal of furniture or other articles or players where an instantaneous appearance or disappearance is required.

When Faust summons the Devil by incantation he turns to the point at which the Devil should appear. Holding this position rigidly, the camera is stopped and the Devil steps into the scene. The fuse of a smoke bomb is lighted and the camera started. When the bomb explodes in a puff of smoke, the Devil steps through the smoke, Faust cowers in fear and the action proceeds. In the cutting room the portion of the film between Faust's summons and the explosion of the bomb is cut out, with the result that as Faust points, there is a puff of smoke through which the Devil seems to appear.

Back turning is used for reversing action. In all cameras the unexposed film is passed down from the top magazine to the bottom box, halting behind the lens for the instant required for exposure. This gives the straightforward action. But by changing the gearing, the film can be run from the bottom box into the top, giving action completely reversed.

Suppose that Jim, the brave young fireman, loves Nell, the daughter of his engineer. So does Bill, the evil switchman. Nell refuses to marry Bill and he swears that Jim shall not marry her either. He trusses her up and lays her on the track to be run over by the very engine of which her father and Jim are the crew. Jim sees a woman on the track and rushes along the running board to the cowcatcher, picking up the girl as the train sweeps past.

Even with the train running slowly it is possible that Jim might fail to catch Nell, with results that would be unpleasant to Nell, to say the least, so back turning is resorted to. The train backs into the scene with Jim carrying Nell. At the proper spot he stoops and lays her on the track. Then in reverse he pretends to be preparing to pick her up. This is the way the scenes will be written to "cover up" the trick:

- 15- Railroad track- Bill enters, carrying Nell- lays her on track- exits.
- 16- Up the road- Train runs through scene.
- 17- Back to No. 15- Nell struggles desperately.
- 18- Nearer point- Jim comes through cab window- runs to cow-catcher.
- 19- Back to No. 17- Nell struggling.
- 20- Train- Jim on cowcatcher.
- 21- Back to No. 19- Train comes into scene- Jim catches Nell up- train through scene.

It will be perceived that only one brief scene is played in reverse and then the audience is too busy with Nell and Jim to note that the smoke is going down the stack and that the wheels are turning backward. It will also be noticed that we have merely indicated the effect we desire, not stopping to tell the director how to get the effect.

Another trick, that of turning, is employed here to get the effect of rapid motion while in reality the scene is played very slowly. It has already been explained that turning the camera slowly will give the effect of rapid motion and vice versa, and here slow turning gives the train a speed in excess of its actual motion.

There is one other form of trick turning, generally employed only in comedy, where the one-to-four crank is used. Now we get action four times as rapid as is natural and the characters seem to jump from spot to spot, a curiously intermittent effect that almost always brings a laugh, though the effect has been sadly overworked and has become almost as much a thing forbidden as the chase.

Double exposure and double printing are two ways of arriving at the same end. The film may be turned back and sent through the camera twice or two negatives may be made and printed, one over the other, on the same piece of positive film. In the former,

generally used to show the same actor on the scene in two places at once, it is customary to make one print with scenery and one against a box of black velvet. This is lined, top, sides and bottom, with black and is better than a straight curtain because there is practically no reflection of light from the cloth. The actor stands in front of this cloth, dressed in light clothes and is registered on the film. His actions are carefully timed to correspond with the actions already registered on the film, a slow and tedious matter of repeated rehearsal. A quicker method is to use a mask and take but one-half of the scene at a time, but this requires that the players shall not cross from one side to the other across the dividing line, and limits the action.

A combination of double exposure with mask or stopping down gives visions and dissolves, the fade also being done in this manner.

Most persons are familiar with the iris diaphragm of the regular camera lense and know that by turning a ring or button the opening can be enlarged from a pin point hole to one almost the size of the lense barrel. The smaller the opening the less light there is passed through to affect the sensitive film. Because of the speed at which they are taken, the almost full opening is used for motion pictures. Stopping down gives a night effect, for night is merely the absence of light.

In a vision the film is first run through with a mask just in front of the film that cuts off that section of each frame where the vision is to appear. Then the film is run back, the mask is changed to one that uncovers only the space for the vision and that is made.

In dissolves no mask is employed, but stopping down is resorted to. We will suppose that Cinderella mopes by the fire and her fairy godmother is to appear. As Cinderella strikes a pose suggesting her deep depression, the cameraman starts to stop down the lense. Less and less light is passed through to affect the film until the diaphragm is down to the limit and there is little more than a trace of a picture registered.

With the diaphragm still closed, the film is turned back to the place where the stopping down commenced. This is an almost full picture, but gradually grows less distinct. Now the Fairy steps into the scene and the camera turns again. This time the diaphragm is closed to give but the faintest image, but as it gradually opens the picture grows more and more distinct. It follows that if the opening of the diaphragm is done in precisely the same manner as the closing was accomplished, that all parts of the picture will be equally exposed except the figure of the fairy. This at first is no more than a misty effect gradually taking shape.

We will suppose that at the start of the dissolve the light value is 9 and gradually runs down to a value represented by a 1. Now the second time the initial exposure will be 1 and the last 9. It follows that all parts of the picture that have been seen twice have a light value of 10 but the fairy starts with an intensity of 1 and runs up to 9, getting the full ten on the next exposure, because she was on the scene only one of the times that the film ran through. A fade from one scene to the next is done in the same way, but now the camera is stopped down at the end of the first scene and opened as the second scene is begun so that one scene dissolves out as the other dissolves in.

It will be seen that with the exception of straight back turning, all trick work involves much labor and time-expense. Be chary of the use of tricks unless you can feel assured that the effect gained will be well worth the trouble and expense involved.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE MULTIPLE REEL

**The series story—the preparation of the script—how to break into parts—numbering the scenes—the synopsis.**

Stories in two or more parts are known as *multiple reels* or two, three or four-part stories as the case may be. While this is undoubtedly the story of the future, its special technique is still so new that few definite rules may be laid down.

Some companies want stories in which each reel or part shall be capable of being used as a single reel independently of the other reels or parts. This is because a story may be found not strong enough in interest to run for two or three reels and yet one or more of the parts may be made into good single reel releases.

The more general demand, however, is for a series of reels with a continuous subject, each reel terminating with a minor climax with the grand climax at the end of the last reel. For this no better example can be given than the play of the stage. At the end of each act there comes a definite stoppage of the action at a point which leaves the audience eager for the continuation. At the end of the first act the villain declares that the heroine shall be his and the curtain falls on this situation, leaving the audience wondering how he is going to bring this to pass. We are eager

for the curtain to rise again that we may have our curiosity gratified. At the end of the second act the hero is being led off to jail on a trumped up charge, while the villain takes the heroine off on a yachting cruise very much against her will. This is a pretty state of affairs and we wonder how things are ever going to right themselves after all this mix-up. We know, because we have been to the theater more than once, that it will all straighten out in the last act and that the villain will get the worst of it, but the situation is interesting and we wish we were up in the gallery along with the rest of the kids that we might hiss the villain, too.

A third form is the disconnected series, such as the Vitagraph's Lambert Chase series in which each story is complete in itself and yet employs a central figure, that of the detective. Sometimes these series of stories are all written by the same person or the task lies between three or four studio writers, but some of them are open to any writer who may be able to catch the trick of writing precisely what is wanted.

It is not a wise plan to write especially for any particular player or series, but if you have a story that might do, send it to the studio with the suggestion that it might do for that series. If you write a special story and fail you must change it about to suit the more general market, and it seldom pays to write particularly for one character or player.

The fourth style is the serial series, of which the first was the Edison, What Happened to Mary, written by Bannister Merwin. These are precisely the same as the monthly or weekly installments of a published serial and must be written by the same author that the unities may be preserved.

In trying to sell the serial series it is best to submit the general idea to the company with which you hope to do business. If they approve, then submit a full synopsis of each installment and submit them all at once. If these synopses are approved, then the script may be developed in full.

This is more a matter for the advanced writer, who, by that time, will need no instruction, so the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to the straight multiple reel.

Methods of preparing the script differ as greatly as the demands of the story. Some editors prefer the single script without the dividing point marked, others want the parts marked in but the script as a whole, while some desire a separate script for each part.

In any event one synopsis and one cast should be made to cover the entire story. The synopsis may be little longer than that for the single reel. It is possible to use three or four hundred words

instead of being limited to 250. The cast is apt to be lengthy and this is all the more reason why care should be taken to provide for the doubles.

We think the best scheme is to number the scenes in consecutive order from 1 as far as they will run. Other schemes are to use Arabic numerals for the first reel, letters for the second and Roman numerals for the third. This is apt to prove awkward and a better scheme is to use the Roman and Arabic in combination, scene seven, of the first reel, being I-7, and the tenth scene of the third reel being III-10. The straight numbering will be found to be the best for the entire subject will be produced as one script and the scenes in the second and third reels that are made in the same sets and locations used for the first will be made at the same time. By having only one scene of the same number there is no possibility of confusion.

One point to observe is that the minor climaxes or critical moments shall fall every thousand feet. This may bother you at first, but a little practice will show you how to write about so much action to each reel. You cannot tell precisely how the action will run unless you are intimately acquainted with the direction methods of the man who will produce your script, and even then you will be none too certain. In writing a magazine serial you know that the breaks should come at the end of each five, eight or ten thousand words as the office rules may require, but in writing action you cannot judge by the number of words and must depend upon the general run of the action.

The multiple-reel is no more than a very strong one reel story fully told. Tell a good strong story and you have a multiple reel. Some two part stories are no more than one reel stories produced with unusual care. Others have more story while still another form fills in with battle scenes and Indian fights to cover the lack of a full story.

There should be no more leading characters for the three reel story than for the one. The same combination of hero, heroine and villain should serve for all parts of the story. There will be a greater number of secondary characters, but the leads will remain fixed whether the story is in one part or ten, because the whole story deals with one leading character precisely as the half reel does.

Most of the military productions are produced from studio scripts or from one reel stories that permit amplification. As a general thing it is better not to mark in the battle scenes too strongly. Give plenty of room for their introduction and a reasonable excuse, but leave the rest to the director who will know

the lay of his land better and be better able to plan the exact movement of the spectacular scenes.

It will be a good plan to start with the one reel and gradually work up to two and three. Get your groundwork laid in on the short subjects and when you come to write the longer subjects you will find them surprisingly easy. The most difficult story to write is not the three reel story but the three hundred foot farce with a real plot.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### ADAPTATIONS

Adaptations not desired—studio staff is better equipped to write these scripts through their knowledge of just what it required—preparing for adaptation.

There is practically no demand for the adaptation of stories, plays, songs, poetry or historical events whether the originals be protected by copyright or not.

It stands to reason that the studio writer is as well, if not better equipped, technically, as yourself and that you can offer the studio nothing that it does not possess. You have the advantage over him only when you offer originality. In 1909 we wrote an author in regard to the situation and these words still hold good. We said:

"The idea of asking you to contribute is to get your ideas. We have the technique here in the studio, but we cannot, very naturally, think up all possible plots. We can think of only such as the men employed are capable of devising. This is not always enough to keep the directors busy, so we ask your help and are willing to pay for it, but we want your ideas, not technique alone. That we have."

"It stands to reason that the staff can make a better adaptation than you can. We know what we have in the way of outside locations and what the scene dock has and what can be made. We know the costume room and the resources of the property man. You might hesitate to call for a marble terrace, for instance, but we would write in several because we know where we can borrow a country estate. Most of all, we know our people and just what they can do."

That is precisely the situation today. No studio staff can think of all the ideas and so they are willing to go into the market and

buy ideas, but all studio staffs possess not only technique but an intimate knowledge of the resources of the studio and the capabilities of the players. They know that Miss Blank would be better in Romeo and Juliet than in As You Like It, because she does not look well in tights and that while Mr. Dash is a heart breaker in evening clothes or well tailored business suits, he would look like an ass playing Romeo or Orlando, so they will adapt Romeo and Juliet, but they will write Romeo for Mr. Twostar, who can wear romantic dress and not look silly. The outside writer would try and fit Dash because he and Miss Blank generally play opposite each other.

If you have ideas for sale, offer them. If you lack ideas, do not seek to vend the ideas of another.

But it is to be supposed that some of the students of photoplay seek studio positions and that some will realize their ambition. Others will profit through making adaptations for the practice they gain in technique, and for their benefit a few suggestions are offered.

First of all, study the book. Read it over several times until you are thoroughly familiar with the incidents and characters. Let the latter become as real to you as flesh and blood persons. Read back of the printed lines for their modes of thought and their emotions. Note each incident not alone by itself but in its relation to the other incidents. You will probably find a thread of main plot and one or more side issues. Mark which each is.

Next, mentally or on paper, arrange the incidents in chronological order. It is seldom that a novel or story is written in exact chronological order, but a play must follow that order exactly.

Perhaps the best example of this is to be found in the Vitagraph's three-part Tale of Two Cities. Dr. Manette's story, which is found well along in the book, is not related as a story, but the incidents of which the story treats are assigned their proper place in the film.

We cannot, as in fiction, turn back in the middle of the story to relate matters that happened before the first chapter. If Geraldine is not the daughter of the wealthy Samuel Sinclair, but a foundling left at his door one stormy night, we cannot explain this in scene nineteen, where Aubrey Armstrong, her sweetheart, learns for the first time of her origin. It might be put in with a leader, but it will give a greater dramatic value in visualization if we know all along that the child is a foundling and are sorry for both Aubrey and Geraldine, so first show that dark and stormy night no matter where the author places the incident. A photoplay should be like a calendar with each day in its proper

place. We cannot move Christmas over into May or bring Easter down to the Fourth of July.

Having arrayed these facts in proper sequence, throw out all that do not actually advance the main plot and see if you have enough action left. See also that the main plot is not too dependent on the side action. If more action is needed, add some of the other material. Do not try to get in all that the author got in merely because he did get it in. Make your great aim to get the story down complete without regard to the padding or the literary style. You are concerned only with the main story. If you can get that all down it is sufficient.

In adapting plays the process is much the same. The action is divided into scenes and acts, but it may be that a single sentence in the dialogue of the last act will indicate a scene in the early part of the photoplay or even a succession of scenes.

In the earlier version of this book we used the hunting scene, spoken by Lady Gay, in London Assurance, as an example of the fact that the visualized drama presents greater opportunities than the stage play. This time we can point to the Reliance production in support of the statement.

Poems and songs lend themselves to broader treatment as a rule and permit or even require the interpolation of other scenes and incidents to supplement the rather meagre plot that can be conveyed in brief verse. The Selig production of Sally in Our Alley, adapted from the song of that name by Miss Hetty Gray Baker, is a case in point. There was little to the song-poem. Miss Baker supplied her own plot and sold it to Selig from the outside. To all practical purposes it was her own play, though carrying a song title. On the other hand the same company's The Vagabonds was a straight adaptation of that poem and probably would not have been purchased from an outside contributor.

Each studio employs one or more men whose knowledge of classic and current literature is at least as extensive as your own. Do not try to sell your literary knowledge to them either as adaptation or original work. If you do Romeo and Juliet in modern dress, give it some modern twists to go with the new dressing.

## CHAPTER XXI

## THE TALKING PICTURES

How they are made—the limitations—timing the picture—range of subjects—their future.

This little book is intended for the man who writes photoplays and the talking picture does not properly lie within the scope of this volume, but a few words on the subject will lead to a better understanding of the situation and its relation to the photoplay or silent drama.

The talking picture is no more than a sketch or play reproduced by means of motion pictures and the phonograph working in synchrony, that is, the phonograph says "Curse you, Jack Dalton" at the same moment that the pictures show the player enunciating these words. That, at least, is the theory, but in practice it frequently happens that the phonograph is ahead of the picture or vice versa.

Thomas A. Edison is not the inventor of the talking picture, nor does he claim to be, but his perfection of the phonograph for use in connection with his form of the device enables the record to be made at the same time that the picture is. In many forms the record is first made close to the horn and then, while the record is run off the players again repeat the speeches while they are photographed.

At the time this chapter is written certain mechanical difficulties confront the maker of talking subjects. Perhaps the most important is the limited duration of the phonograph record, necessitating the breaking of scenes on the stoppage of one record and starting fresh on the next where the scene runs longer than the six minutes that the record runs. Various schemes are being tried, but with this we have nothing to do, our interest lying on the play and not the mechanical side.

For a time at least, the scenes of the talking picture must be held indoors, because of the weight of the apparatus and the attention it would attract on the street.

Talking pictures are written precisely like any other stage play since the talking picture is precisely that, but as a rule the action or stage directions are written in more fully than with the drama

of the stage, since the action must be figured with the speech in writing the play to an exact measurement of time and film.

Some of the productions are confined to one scene and six minutes, and others run up to five hundred or one thousand feet. If the author desires to try his hand at the talking picture script he should first advise with the companies as to length.

Dialogue is no more than speech written down, the speech of every-day life. It is on this point that the average stage dramatist fails at the start. He seeks to produce dialogue that will read well rather than that which can be spoken naturally and convincingly. He ventures as closely as he may dare to the blank verse of Shakespeare. The real dramatist, to the contrary, strives to reproduce as closely as possible the speech of every day life. It is not necessary to use flowery phrases and rounded pauses. Say: "Please hand me that glass of water," rather than: "I pray thee give me drink."

Remember that dialogue on the stage is spoken a trifle more slowly because of the need of clear enunciation, nowhere more important than in the making of phonograph records, and allow for this in judging the length to which the dialogue will run. Make full allowance for the business and by-play and remember that even in a sustained conversation there will be a pause of a part of a second between speeches.

Few characters should be employed and no effort may yet be made to produce mob scenes. Have the character drawings clean cut and accurate, do not have all of your people talk in the same general way. Give personality to their speech as well as to their actions and apparent modes of thought.

For a time, at any rate, only the advanced writers can hope for any marked degree of success.

Talking Pictures are more important to the photoplay writer because of their supposed influence upon the silent drama.

It is not probable that talking pictures will seriously affect the photoplay proper, for the chief charm of the photoplay lies in its condensation of action. In the quickness of movement that permits a reasonably full story to be unfolded in twenty minutes of action.

It was this quality which gave it its advantage over the stage drama as much as the cheaper price of admission. One may witness three plays within an hour, though those same plays might require two or three hours for presentation were it necessary to speak all of the dialogue. A gesture may often replace a page speech and a situation show more than minutes of dialogue could tell. It is not probable that this condensation of action will be replaced by the talking picture, which has as its advantage over the

drama of the stage only the fact that players of greater merit can be employed in the parts since the presentation has to be made but once.

Against this advantage there are so many disadvantages to be considered, that it is highly probable that the talking and silent pictures will have little, if anything in common.

The talking picture lacks the element of condensation, it cannot be used as universally as the photoplay, since it will appeal only to those who can understand the language spoken, and it will be a long time before the mechanical difficulties can be overcome.

Certain alarmists affect to see in the talking picture the doom of the photoplay, but most experienced observers are agreed in the belief that the talking pictures can do the photoplay little or no harm either in the present or at some future time. Undoubtedly the talking pictures will be brought to a greater point of perfection as time passes and will become a regular form of theatrical amusement, either by themselves or in the vaudeville theaters, or both, but it is highly improbable that they will prevent or even appreciably retard the advance of the silent drama. It will be more interesting, perhaps, to both see and hear a Bernhardt in Camille, but many will prefer a Camille lasting perhaps three-quarters of an hour to a performance continuing for three hours.

Talking pictures may supplement, but they can never supplant the photoplay.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### COPYRIGHT AND THE COPYRIGHTED STORY

What copyright is—what protection afforded—manuscript not copyrightable—what may and may not be taken from the copyrighted story.

Probably no question is more frequently asked by the novice than just how far it is possible to go in using the material of a story protected by copyright.

Sometimes, indeed most often, the question seems to be asked in all sincerity, but all too often the question is phrased so clearly that it reads. "Just how far may I proceed in stealing the work of another brain and get away with it?"

The answer in either case is simple. You may derive inspiration but not material, from the work of another. Just what in-

spiration means is a matter between you and your conscience, since it is not easy to draw an exact line that may not be crossed.

Suppose that you read a story of a girl who has married the wrong man. He treats her brutally. She shoots him, not altogether in self-defense. The purpose of the book is to argue that a .32 bullet for the man is better than an arsenic tablet for the woman.

If you write of a woman who marries the wrong man and shoots him, you've taken too much from the story. Suppose you argue that she should have left him, should have tried harder to reform him or, in short, anything but killing him. The further you get away from the story, the safer you are from a charge of theft. You'll probably stay within the legal rights. But suppose that this story gave you the idea of a similar match in which the birth of a child drove the pair still further apart but its death united them.

In such a case you can take your check with a clear conscience, for you have not stolen the idea. You have merely given an impetus to your own imagination through reading the product of another imagination. That, perhaps, is the surest test. If you work your imagination and direct it rightly, you have produced instead of copying.

You can take the start or the finish or perhaps take a part of the middle and use it for a start. Once you have a start, if you possess imagination, the rest is easy, but if you have no imagination you cannot write photoplays and it is useless to try and become a literary burglar because your sins will find you out.

There is a commercial as well as moral side to this matter. You may be able to sell a few stolen stories but you'll soon become known for a thief and have that reputation precede you into studios you never visited. More than one promising career has been wrecked by taking too much inspiration.

If the above paragraphs do not apply to you, they are not meant for you, but so many take up photoplay without previous literary experience that it seems to be necessary to lay down these facts with seemingly undue emphasis for the benefit of a few.

Now for copyright itself. If you have produced a play, a book, a lecture, a painting, a song, a statue, a drawing, a map, or a design and fear to publish the same lest others copy your idea, the government says in effect: "Go ahead and dedicate your work to the public, then give a copy to the Register of Copyrights. If John Smith reproduces your work he will have to stop it and give you all the money he has made, because we have enacted a set of

laws to that effect. All you have to do is to register your work to give notice that this is what you claim protection for."

Now you can give your work to the world through publication, and if anyone infringes your rights you have a clean cut set of laws exactly defining your rights, but first you must publish that work or "dedicate it to the public" as the law reads, and next you must give to the copyright office one or more copies, according to the classification of the article, and say in effect "This is what I claim protection for."

If you claim the copyright protection without registering the article then you not only have no protection, since you cannot prove in law that you wanted to protect it, but you are liable to a fine for having claimed copyright without having actually copyrighted the article.

You can copyright a book, because you have printed that in copies for sale, but you cannot copyright the manuscript of a book because that is not offered to the public but is offered to a publisher in the hope that he will print it and offer it to the public for you.

Your status is precisely that of the author of a book. If you print your photoplay and offer copies for sale, you can claim copyright on the book as a book and the book copyright protects you from any sort of infringement. No one but you or a person authorized by you, can make a photoplay production of that published book. If you photograph your story you can copyright it as a photoplay either as "reproduced in copies for sale" or "not reproduced in copies for sale," and no one can make a photoplay from your script or turn it into a book or a dramatic play. But until you have published that photoplay either as a printed book or a photographic film, you are not entitled the protection that is offered published works.

Mr. Thorvald Solberg, the Register of Copyrights, is one of the most efficient servants in Government employ in that he is constantly striving to give the fullest and most complete service his department can be made to afford. Twice he has urged upon the Congressional Committee that the manuscript photoplay be admitted to copyright; not that he feels that copyright protection should be needed, but because so many have sought it. Each time the request has been refused and probably will be refused by successive Congresses if for no other reason than that the unpublished manuscript is as fully protected by common law as is the published work by Copyright Law.

Most authors seem to think that if they could put "Copyrighted" on their scripts it would stop possible thieves. Some of them do announce their work as having been copyrighted when

they know perfectly well that it is not copyrighted, thereby rendering themselves liable to punishment.

It is one of the kinks of the law that if you announced that your story was copyrighted and then went into court with a suit it would be thrown out under copyright law because it was not copyrighted and thrown out under common law because you said that it had been.

In any case all copyright means to you is that you can sue under a definite enactment instead of common law.

Unlike the Patent Office, the Copyright Office does not guarantee against the registration of an infringing claim. Two or more persons may register the same book, but since there can be but one legal registration, if you can prove that you are the original author the rights lie with you, only you must go to court and submit to the usual delays and adjournments if you would prove your case.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CENSORSHIP OF FILMS

National Board of Censorship—Police Censorships—what is forbidden, and why—when crime is permissible.

At present most American-made pictures as well as those made abroad and released on regular dates are submitted to the National Board of Censorship, which is in no sense an official body, being composed of delegates from the various civic societies forming The People's Institute, of New York City. The Board derives its sole power from the manufacturers whose films are thus submitted. There is absolutely nothing to prevent the distribution and exhibition of a film not passed by the Board save the common sense reason that experience has shown that a picture so disapproved will be stopped by the police in many cities, not so much because it has not been passed by the Censors as because it is unsuitable for display in theaters so largely frequented by young people.

The Board was brought into being at the request of the exhibitors of New York City and has been maintained, largely through the contributions of the manufacturers because it has been found that the Board renders valuable service in checking ultra sensationalism that eventually must react against the maker of such films.

If you will notice the censorship tag you will see that it states the film has been "passed" by the Board. At the start some manufacturers used a tag announcing that the firm had been "approved" by the Board, but it was explained that the Board passed much material of which it did not approve and the wording was changed.

That alteration is the whole story of the Board. It aims at the highest ideals, but it passes much that it does not approve of, since the material is not vicious. Its rulings and suggestions are as liberal as is consistent with common sense and it lays down no arbitrary laws but seeks rather to consider the act and the reason rather than the act alone. The picturing of a wanton crime will be forbidden where precisely the same crime will be passed if the commission of that crime is necessary to point the lesson that crime must inevitably find its punishment. A crime performed in a moment of passion is more apt to be passed than a deed done in cold blood. A crime suggested may be passed where the crime shown in detail would be disapproved.

In general the Board bars from stories all pictures based on crime and the commission of crime, all immorality and immoral acts, the lewd, the lascivious, the vicious, the cruel, the irreverent and the irreligious. But while these factors are all barred, many of them may be used if done with proper care if used to point a moral, lascivious and irreligious themes excepted. These are always barred.

If Smith shoots Brown in cold blood to get the money that he knows Brown carries and if this act is performed merely to throw a little side light on the character of Smith, the deed will be barred. Precisely the same action might be allowed if the object was to show that having killed Brown, Smith, though escaping the law, found a punishment more terrible in the tortures of his own conscience.

But it is not probable that the Board would pass a film showing the actual murder, because it is not necessary to show this. It is sufficient to show the two men quarreling. There is a cut to some other scene and we come back to Smith standing over Brown with a smoking revolver in his hand.

The woman who wantonly gives herself up to a life of shameful pleasure is not regarded as the fit subject for a story to place before young people. The woman who is led astray and who repents and is forgiven will point a moral.

It is best to avoid the underworld and the higher walks of crime. Saloons and other places of evil repute should not be shown or else shown so briefly as to carry small effect. Keep away from the atmosphere of crime and debauchery and avoid

as much as possible the showing of fights, burglaries, or any other infraction of the laws. The juvenile mind is receptive and observant. We question whether they learn much in the picture theaters that they have not already learned outside, but it is easier to blame it on photoplays than anything else and so photoplays have come in for an undeserved bad name. It should be the aim of the author to restore the good name.

If you write clean and decent stories, you do not have to bother about the Board of Censorship. If you want to revel in crime and bloodshed you must be careful to keep the actions of your character within the unwritten law. And mind you, merely because you say that your moral is a good one it does not follow that the story will pass. It must be a good one.

The rulings of the Board are given on the first print of the film and before the cut negative is sent to the printing room. Therein lies the value of the National Board. It helps the manufacturer to decide just what will pass before fifty to one hundred prints of the objectionable parts are made. After the prints are made and distributed, the local or police censorships in some cities make their own rulings and these, being made by persons less well qualified to judge, may result in all crime scenes being cut out instead of merely those which are without excuse. Therefore, when a story is returned to you with the statement that it will not pass, it may mean the local censorships rather than the National Board.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE STOLEN STORY

**Do editors steal stories?—a frank discussion of a question you are bound to ask—how duplications occur.**

Sooner or later—and generally sooner—every author, whether of fiction or photoplay, is bound to ask if Editors are stealing his stories. No matter how experienced a writer may be, there are bound to come times when he is certain that his stories have been stolen by some studio to which he sent it.

Beyond question there must be some dishonest employees in a business so large, and it is useless to argue that stories are never stolen, but on the other hand the number of these thefts is negligible and in a greater number of instances the charges are without foundation.

You send your story to a studio and it comes back. Presently you find that the company has released or is about to release a story identical with your own. You are certain that it is your own and you talk wildly about suits and all that sort of thing. It may be that an Editor, having to write a story a week as part of his contract has remembered, consciously or sub-consciously, the idea of your story, but it is far more likely that the Editor found a script he liked and put it in work. It is possible that you and the author of this second story both derived inspiration from the same source and that the other did his work in better fashion. His story was taken because of its development where yours was passed over and forgotten. We have seen in a single week's batch of stories three to five scripts so nearly alike that they might all have been copied from a common source. More than that, perhaps two or three more came in the next week and the next. If any one of these stories had been purchased, possibly fifty other authors would have cried that they had been robbed. They make no allowance for the fact that the idea is commonplace and likely to suggest itself to anyone. They know only that their story is just like that on the screen except a few scenes where the Editor had fixed it up. And that it just where the answer lies. The "fixing up" was done to the same idea by another author more careful or more experienced and his idea sold on that fixing up.

A farcical story was written and sent direct to a producer in the field nearly a thousand miles from the studio, the work being done by a writer a hundred miles from the home office. The story was produced and immediately another writer declared that she had been robbed as she had sent that story to the studio some time before. Investigation showed that she had sent such a story in after the director had gone south. There was no possibility by which the other author or the director could have seen this script, and the fact was explained to her, but immediately she amended her complaint to add the charge that her idea had been sent the other author, who really had worked over one of his old fiction stories written and published about eight years previously.

Take another case. A scene from the Solax Spry Spinsters in which a spite fence was introduced suggested to a writer a story written wholly about a spite fence. The result was an almost perfect reproduction of Vitagraph's Suing Susan. Had the story been made it would have looked suspicious, to say the least, but a vigilant editor caught it in time.

It is inconceivable that of the thousands of scripts turned out yearly by authors many of whom are not practised hands at plot devising, there should not be much duplication of idea. It may

be that your idea has been duplicated by another, but with a better technical development, so that the other is taken where yours is declined. It may be that the other was in work when yours was sent back and that the Editor did not advise you of this fact.

In time most authors encounter a duplicated story under circumstances that make it impossible that their idea has been stolen. After that they are cured of this hallucination, but few are immune from an attack at some time in their writing experience.

Give the Editors the benefit of the doubt. The probabilities are that they are without blame in the matter. No matter what the manager of the picture theater may tell you, or the man who used to work for a company. The chances are that neither knows any more about it than you do, but you seem to want to have your doubts confirmed and it is easier to say "Yes" than to argue "No."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### YOU AND THE EDITOR

A few hints on how to sell to advantage—your attitude toward the editor—the slight value of personal pull—querying manuscript—lost scripts.

A few words on the subject of your intercourse with the Editor.

Most editors are men and women of intelligence, attainment and good breeding. They are courteous, helpful and conscientious. They are far more eager to buy your script than you are to have them, but they cannot purchase it unless it comes up to standard, and they cannot spare the time to revise your script when others are at hand that will require much less work and present an equally good idea.

If they have time and your work gives promise, they will frequently give you a hint or perhaps even write you one or more letters of advice. If they do it is an entirely gratuitous service for which they are not paid by their employer and which is generally done solely for the purpose of helping you along.

If you receive a letter it is entirely proper to return a brief note of thanks. Do not fill several pages with gushy thanks—and innumerable other questions. Your note should be sincere but brief. If the editor elects to reply to this, let that letter be your guide, but never seek to force a correspondence.

If you receive a script without message of any sort do not feel insulted. Most offices use a rejection slip which is enclosed with each return, but in some offices the envelopes are given to an office boy to fill in and seal. It may be that he will overlook one or two and yours may be one of these. If your script is returned without any printed form, you can guess that it is not wanted, and this, after all, is the important thing.

You may take positive assurance that your script has been read by some competent person; not through, perhaps, but to a point where the reader is assured that it is not suitable. It is perfectly useless to ask for a second reading or to write and ask that you be informed just why the script was returned. If you send the script it will not be read again and if you do not send the script it would be impossible to reply.

Bear this one fact in mind. The Editor is hired by his employer to select from the mass of stuff sent in, the stories suitable for the use of that studio and to get these in proper form for the directors. It is no part of the editorial duties to instruct you in the art of photoplay writing or to engage in an extended correspondence with you on any subject. It is your part to discover precisely what the studio's wants are through a study of the films shown on the screen or through a constant study of the synopses of releases published each week in *THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD*.

Few, if any of the studios now receipt for stories, but if you desire a receipt, you may enclose a postal card with the request that it be returned to you as soon as the script is received. The best form is simply worded, something like this:

Your manuscript

*Loved by Another*

has been received and will be passed upon in due time.

BLANK FILM COMPANY.

This is not a receipt in the legal sense for, for by common usage it is understood that a studio shall use due care in handling scripts while in its custody but that it is not responsible for the loss of a story in transit or in the studio. If a story comes back all dirty and disfigured, write a courteous note free from complaint or sarcasm, returning the script and setting forth the facts. Most studios will have the script recopied for you or send you a copying fee.

If you get no action on your story in six or eight weeks, send a stamped and addressed envelope for reply, state the title of the story and date sent and ask if it has been lost in the mail or being held for decision. Take it for granted that it is one of these two reasons. Do not ask him why the story has not been read nor hint that you are starving to death waiting for a check.

In time, if you can obtain no reply to inquiries and feel that there is no use waiting any longer, write a note of this tenor:

BLANK FILM CO.,  
SOMEWHERE, N. J.  
Dear Sirs:—

Being unable to obtain any reply to my inquiries of (here give dates of all letters) I beg to advise you that I shall have the story copied and submitted elsewhere and shall hold you strictly responsible for any use you may make of the manuscript in your possession.

That is all that is necessary. Do not waste your energy in "roasts" and save your sarcasm. Send this by registered mail to the last known address of the company. It is well to show the letter to some other person and to register the letter and request that a receipt be returned.

Do not send in the synopsis of a story and ask the Editor if he wishes to purchase the script. He cannot tell from the synopsis if the plot of action will be good. The nearest he can come to judgment will be the supposition that if you know how to write you would know enough to send the full script.

Do not send him a carbon copy to read. Many beginners send out the original and three or four carbons to as many studios in the hope of getting quick action. Two or more companies may start production at the same time and send you checks, with the result that you will find yourself in an unpleasant predicament. Have only one copy of any story out at one time and that the ribbon copy. If it gets soiled or mussed, make a fresh ribbon copy if you want to send it out again. Do not send a carbon and an excuse.

Do not auction off your script by sending out several copies to as many studios with the statement that on a certain date the script will go to the highest bidder. You will be wasting your stamps and spoiling editorial tempers.

Do not dump your entire string into an office because you have sold one script there. If you have succeeded in getting in, aim to stay in by sending only your very best work.

More than one writer has gained a start by selecting a particular studio and sending all his best work there, but only his best. It may all come back but the repeated submission of good stuff will have its effect in time. Eventually you will strike their fancy and not only sell but keep on selling because they will know that your success was not purely an accident. Naturally the Editor would prefer to deal with those who can be counted on to keep on sending in good scripts.

## CHAPTER XXVI

## SELF-CRITICISM

**Difficulties of self-criticism—lack of proper perspective—interest in the subject—value of delayed judgment.**

Even the most experienced authors are not fully competent to pass their own work in review and this is one of the reasons why the experienced writer is content to submit his work "at usual rates." He knows very well that he may like best the story that will make the least appeal to others. He lacks the proper perspective. He stands too close to his own work to see the faults and the merits in their proper value.

It stands to reason that one does not develop a plot unless he thinks that plot reasonably good. He does this work with this idea uppermost and it follows that he develops the plot in the manner he believes to be the most suitable. When the work is done he may set it down with the feeling that it might be improved, but it is seldom that he can exactly locate the trouble. This chapter is not offered in the belief that self-criticism can be taught, but to enable the author as nearly as possible to gauge and value his work.

The great essential is time. It is not possible for anyone to remove the last sheet from the machine, read over the pages and pronounce it to be good or bad. The glow of enthusiasm must be permitted to die out, other work must be done to erase, in so far as possible, the memory of the story and then, after an interval of days or weeks, the script should be taken up with the mind as free as possible from the recollections of that story and the reasons for working up the idea as was done.

It is a poor mother who does not think her baby the handsomest and best, and it is a poor author, indeed, who does not hold his brain child in similar esteem, but babies may be weighed and measured in comparison with established tables and stories may, to some extent, be compared with existing standards.

Do not, in criticism, regard your story as a whole. Take it apart and consider each factor separately, then get it together again to see that the adjustments are correct; that each part bears a proper relation to the whole.

The best way is first to dissect the plot and then, with the disjointed plot before you, consider the scenes with relation to their parts of the plot and the plot as a whole.

The first step, then, is to catalogue the various incidents. If you will turn to the chapter on punch you will see that there the story of the bank clerks is dissected into factors. In order to work with new material, suppose that we take Mr. McCloskey's story of "Auntie's Affinity," which is given in full.

The first point is that Ethel lives with her Aunt at the hotel. The second is that she is in love with Harry. The third point is that Auntie objects to Harry, the fourth, that Peitro is the chef at the hotel, and so on. A proper tabulation would look something like this:

Peitro is chef at the hotel.

Ethel and her Aunt live at the hotel.

Ethel loves Harry.

Auntie objects to Harry.

Ethel plans to take a clandestine ride with Harry.

Auntie goes out alone for a walk.

She meets a distinguished stranger, who is none other than Peitro.

They do not recognize each other.

She invites Peitro to visit at the hotel, but he does not dare. She makes an appointment for the next day, which she keeps.

Peitro tells her that he is a Count.

Peitro proposes and is accepted.

Peitro buys the ring.

Peitro loses the ring.

It falls into the pudding.

Ethel finds the ring in her portion of pudding.

Ethel reports the matter to the office.

Harry investigates and Peitro claims the ring.

Auntie is horrified to discover in the chef her Count.

In the excitement Harry and Ethel elope.

They return and are forgiven by Harry's father.

Peitro returns to the hotel insisting on seeing Auntie.

Auntie is withholding her approval of Ethel's marriage.

Peitro proves himself a real Count.

In her delight Auntie forgives Ethel and the picture closes.

The first thing that strikes us is the excellent and orderly arrangement of the incident. Discarding some of the love scenes between Harry and Ethel which are not essential to the main plot, we have the story passing from one point to the other, not only in chronological order but in the exact order that will give the greatest comedy value.

That is the first point to be looked to. Suppose that instead of this arrangement we had excluded from the original draft those scenes showing Peitro in the kitchen. This would have been a natural move, holding back the discovery of Peitro's occupation until scene thirty-five, that the audience might be surprised. This would be a perfectly natural move, most especially to the beginner, but let's think it over.

If we had not shown Peitro in the kitchen, we would have come upon development number seven in scene sixteen with Peitro a total stranger to the spectator. Here comes a new character. Who is he? We do not know. We not only wonder who he is, and lose interest in the action because we are busy wondering, but we lose completely the comedy of idea. Knowing that Peitro is the chef in the hotel in which Auntie is a guest, the meeting at once becomes big with possibilities. Auntie's encounter with a distinguished stranger is not one-tenth as amusing as the idea of Auntie discreetly flirting with the chef of the hotel.

Note well how the author, realizing the need for showing that Peitro does not fill a menial capacity, discloses that Peitro is the overlord of the kitchen. Peitro is the czar of his domain and in each of the kitchen scenes this fact is emphasized. We feel ~~w~~ greater interest in the chef than in the dishwasher and it is because he is a chef and not a dishwasher that he is a possibility.

So this schedule of incident will either show us that the plot is properly developed or that it lacks certain treatment. In this bare assemblage of facts there is lacking the color of the action and we can study the skeleton of the idea and make certain that the bones are properly articulated. We can see whether or not each new development comes into the story in its proper place or not. If we find a fact misplaced it is an easy matter to change the schedule. Suppose that we had, as the first development, that Peitro was a real Count, the scene perhaps showing him receiving the notification. A glance at the schedule would have shown that the fact that he really was a count was out of place. We cannot get the surprise for the climax from the fact that he is a chef. We can get it from the fact that he really is a count. That fact might not show from merely reading the story, but once trained to develop plots, the schedule will show almost at a glance, and certainly with a little study, whether or not the factors are correctly placed.

Once the argument is properly arranged, take the scenes each in its turn. The first two scenes are devoted to introducing the characters. Here is the chef of the hotel, here are the proprietor and his son and here are Aunt Amanda and Ethel, her niece,

guests of the hotel. Ethel is in love with the son. Aunt Amanda objects. Peitro is first introduced because Peter Lang, who played the part, was the star of the production, otherwise the scene showing the kitchen might have been used as a break between the present two and four.

About scene twelve we want to show a new side of Peitro. We will take him out of the kitchen whites and show him in street attire. To see him on the street might have been sufficient, but scene twelve performs two services. It shows the change in the man and it brings him into sixteen with the suggestion of the kitchen still fresh in mind. At first glance the novice might consider that scene unessential and put in merely to fill out the picture, but it will be seen that it really performs two important purposes.

We note, too, that between twelve and sixteen there are two actions carried along; the ride of Harry and Ethel, advancing their love affair, and the walk of Aunt Amanda. In the time required to show these brief scenes there is plenty of time for Peitro to have reached the park for his encounter with Aunt Amanda. To take him out of the kitchen and into the park would have been too abrupt, but by filling in with other and essential action we cover this lapse of time while holding <sup>the</sup> interest of the audience.

We have under discussion a correctly planned play, one that was accorded an unusual amount of praise and which was selected on that account, but in examining your own script you will probably find that the addition or subtraction of a scene or the transposition of one or more scenes will make a decided improvement in your work if you take each scene by itself in relation to the other scenes and do not merely read the story as a whole.

The story should lead from a simple incident to the crowning incident of the play by a gradual ascent. The outline of your story should suggest an inclined plane rather than the profile of a roller coaster track. If you find that you have too much sag, build it up, if an early scene stands out too strongly, tone it down or put it where it belongs. In dramatic construction it is sometimes planned to have a fall in the dramatic action just before the climax, but it is better in photoplay to plan the gradual advance.

There is a third factor to be studied, the characters themselves. Do they belong in the story and do they fit each other? Is your heroine worthy of the trouble you are taking in her behalf? You cannot get your audiences interested in a silly little fool. Is your hero of the proper sort? No one cares for a spineless hero.

who crumples up before the attacks of the villain and must be rescued by the heroine. Are the subsidiary characters those best suited to advance the plot and uphold the interest?

If your story will stand this analysis it is apt to be a good story, but in order to study the plot, the scene, or the character, it will first be necessary to separate it from the rest of the play, to first consider it by itself and then in relation to the other factors. If you can do this work carefully and without prejudice you can roughly criticize your work if you have the knowledge that backs your judgment.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### HOW TO STUDY

#### The value of practice—need for study—the theater as a school-room—self-criticism—the value of advice

This, then, is the technique of the photoplay, the technique of form, of construction, of creation. The rest remains with you.

The great teacher is experience. You would not purchase a text-book on electricity and after a single reading expect to be able to build dynamos and motors, to wire buildings and install telephone systems. No more can you read this or any other book through and expect at once to write plays that will sell. First you must study the rule and then learn, through experience, to apply it.

Do not think that it is sufficient to read this volume through once or even many times. Study it. Absorb every fact and not the fact alone, but the reason for that fact. In the school room you did not merely glance through your grammar. You studied the rules and then you practised the application of those rules, you analyzed sentences, the relation of each word to the others until, at the end, you acquired an instinctive application of the rules. You not only learned to speak the language correctly, but you knew why you were correct. It is the same way with photoplay. Having the rules, you must learn to apply them, to pick apart plays and perceive the relation of the scenes to each other.

Do not believe the misleading statements contained in the advertisements of self styled schools which declare that any boy or girl can learn to write photoplays. Give no heed to statements such as one recently to hand that declared that one could begin to write photoplays within three hours after receipt of instructions. It cannot be done. A reasonably close study of a script will enable a person of average intelligence to turn out something that is in the form of a photoplay, but it will not be better than the form.

Writing photoplays is as much a fine art as writing the drama of the stage or the story in fiction form. The rules differ and there is not required the mastery of phrase and literary style that are demanded of the other forms, but this is offset by the need for being able to write in action so clearly that this action is as plain and understandable as the written word. The fact that literary style is not required does not also excuse the lack of inventiveness, of creative ability, of originality of thought. These are, in some ways, more necessary to the photoplay writer than to the fiction writer, since the latter is able, to a certain extent, to hide poverty of idea behind a plausible and fluent expression. Imagination and the ability to direct imagination are even more essential to the photoplay writer than to the creator of fiction.

Next to imagination, the most important requisites are patience and persistence; patience to endure the labor of practise, persistence to enable you to withstand the discouraging failures that will, at first, confront you. It is disheartening to spend days, perhaps weeks, even, on a script, only to be told that the idea has been used before, but you at least have had the benefit of the practice and your time has not been lost.

Perhaps the most unfortunate thing that could happen to you would be the sale of your first two or three scripts. More than one promising career has been either ruined or retarded because the first few scripts sold promptly.

It sometimes happens that the novice, coming fresh to the work, may have one or more ideas so good that the editor overlooks the structural faults for the sake of the uniqueness of the idea. Suppose that this happened to you. You would not be human did you not attribute these acceptances to your skill and not to chance. You promptly conclude that writing photoplays is even easier than you thought and you sink into a careless habit of rattling off your ideas without any examination of the plot. Everything that comes to you is an idea. Promptly it goes down on paper in hit or miss fashion and as

promptly it is sent out to some studio. After a while the succession of rejections, unrelieved by any acceptances, discourages you. You stop work, concluding that photoplays do not pay.

If you had made no early sales you would have been ready to face the failures through which success is really won, but these few almost accidental successes have done their work and you are not willing, once the rejections commence, to face the long, hard pull.

Success that comes quickly is seldom lasting nor of real value. The success that is won through earnest, persistent effort, that is built on hard work and labor intelligently directed is the kind that lasts because it is not built on chance. So do not be in too much of a hurry to sell. Be prepared to serve your apprenticeship that you may become a master workman and enjoy a master's privileges.

Do not think that you can materially shorten this apprenticeship through school courses. There is a certain amount of drudgery that must be performed before you can qualify and this work no one can perform for you. You cannot buy success. There is only the school of experience and the class room is the motion picture theater, but you must regard it, for the time being, as class room and not as a place of amusement.

If you had spent your entire life a hundred miles from navigable water, you would not expect to be able to build a ship or even a rowboat without having seen one. No plans or pictures can fully replace the intimate personal knowledge of thorough examination. It is the same way with photoplays. You cannot expect to write them without some familiarity with the screened picture. If you wanted to build a rowboat you would not simply look at it. You would closely examine every detail of construction, and this same careful examination is required before you can really know motion pictures.

It is best to go to the theater alone that you shall not be disturbed by the comment of a friend and look on the picture, not as a diversion, but with much the same spirit as that in which the medical student approaches the dissecting table. Your interest lies not so much in what appears on the surface as what may be discovered by deeper investigation. Look not so much at the picture as a drama, but as a study. Good or bad it will equally well repay your analysis.

The probabilities are that you are reasonably familiar with motion pictures on the screen, in which case you are out of the kindergarten and ready for the intermediate course.

Study, to apply to the filmed picture, the principles here laid

down. Note the resemblance between the scenes you see and the examples you will find here. Add to your mental classification what you see on the screen. Note the handling of the cut-back, the use of trick work, the manner in which the story is developed. Educate yourself so that when you study the book you can add to the examples cited many more from the plays you have seen.

And note always what it is in each picture that makes an impression on you. You like this picture. What was it that you liked? Was it the acting? Was it the story? Was it the production?

Suppose that your answer is that it was the acting. What was there to the acting that won your regard? Was it the personality of some favorite player? Look back of that personality and see if you can see how the story cunningly contrived to show that player at his or her best. Note how all the situations were thrown to that player that your interest might be strengthened in the character. The player, no matter how good he or she may be, cannot hold your interest if the play is not well planned. You think for the moment it is the acting, but you will find that, after all, it was the well written story; so well written, indeed, that you lost sight of the technique in the interest you felt in the character.

That is the true technique; not to show that you are deliberately planning to throw all the interest to the central character, but to so plan the plot and its development that the mechanism by which you influence is not apparent. The best story does not say "Look at Miss Blank. Isn't she lovely? Isn't she charming? Isn't it pathetic that she must give up Joe and marry the rich old miser to save him from bankruptcy? See how we make you think that there is no other way, and now look how we have Joe's rich old aunt die and leave him all her money!" That is not technique; it is mechanics. Technique makes this same appeal but does not let you realize that the appeal has been made.

Perhaps it really was the acting. Perhaps the personal charm and skill of the players was superior to the labored development of the plot. Here too you may learn, for you can see how the clumsy use of incident defeats its ends. It is as important to know what makes a bad story bad as what makes a good story good.

If it was the story that interested you more than the acting, see what there was to that story that made it better than the playing. Take it detail by detail, incident by incident. Set each apart by itself and see what it is like, then put it together again

and see what there was in the construction that caused these separate incidents to form a complete and pleasing whole.

If it was the production that pleased, see how much the author apparently contributed to that production. The production was made by the director, but it was made from an author's script. Try and figure out how much the author brought the producer.

And while you are studying plays on the screen, study also the stories of the films you do not see. You cannot witness all of the produced plays. Get what you cannot see on the screen from the MOVING PICTURE WORLD. This will not only give you the stories to study, but in a general way you will gain an idea of what each company wants from what it is doing, and later on the knowledge of what has been done will aid you in avoiding the theme already used.

Having become familiar with the screened story and with the terms and forms, you are ready for the next step. Select some theater where two or more performances are given each evening and sit through the bill twice. The first time note the story. The second time decide which of the plays has made the strongest impression on you and note all the scenes of this play. Just a word or two will enable you to recall the scene. Put down no more than is necessary.

Now, at home, try to write that play, partly from memory but with the notes to assist you. Make the full plot of the action precisely as though it was an original story you intended to write and submit to some studio. Write in the action precisely as though you were writing the business of a new play. Put in the leaders and the letters just as clearly as you can remember them. Now write the synopsis and cast of characters. You have a complete script from which you may make a careful analysis of the development.

Recall as clearly as possible the points that made the deepest impression on you when you first saw it. Think of how this scene thrilled you with fear, of how that one brought a smile to your face and that other put a lump in your throat. The reason for all these emotions is down on that paper in black and white if you have done your work well. The secret of the sob is clear, the reason for the smile is made plain. You have a clear insight into the mechanics of creating emotion.

But there is one thing that may not appear as clearly on the paper. You do not clearly see the punch, the reason why you liked that play so much better than the others you saw at the same time. You should find the visible punch if you will look for it, but you will, in time, find something else. What that is no

one can tell you. You cannot tell yourself what it is. It has never been put into words and it never will be, but if you are ever going to make a story writer you will find that something in this study of the story that enables you to write plays.

It cannot be analyzed and it cannot be described, but it is an ability to sense the story; to look past the action, past the technique, past the plot and past the punch itself and see the soul of the story. To some people it is never given to gain this sense, to some it comes only after long, arduous labor. Some are born with it, some have it partly developed and need but a little work to bring it out, but no matter how it comes, that instinctive sensing of the story is what makes the real author; is what marks the difference between the playwright and the person who merely performs the mechanical labor of writing a play.

But perhaps even before this comes to you you will be ready to go on to the next step. Instead of merely studying the work of others, study to improve their work. You have the script before you. Mentally redevelop it. See if you cannot better the situations by changing the relation of the scenes or by discarding certain of the scenes and using others in their place. There never was a story produced that could not be improved upon. Study to see how you may improve the work on the plays you have seen, for this will bring a keener insight into the development of the plot than the mere study of the plotting of another.

Study, too, to improve the leaders. Improving does not necessarily mean the cutting down the number of words. You may add a couple of words and get an easy, fluent leader instead of a harsh, disjointed one. Do the same with the letters. See if you cannot make them sound more like real letters. Note where a paragraph from a letter might have been used with better effect than one purporting to be an entire letter. See when the opening or closing paragraph would be better than one from the body of the sheet.

And all this time, it is to be supposed, you are working on your own plots. Work them into rough photoplay form. Write and rewrite them unless you find that the story grows worse with each revision. Writers may be roughly assembled into two classes; those who work best on the first draft and those who do better on revise. Do not mistake laziness for an inability to revise, but on the other hand, do not work too long on a story if you find you do not improve it. Lay it aside and take it up again weeks or even months later.

Now you are ready to do more original work and less copy. You have learned not only the form but the application of form to idea from your work on the plays of others. Now apply

form to your own ideas with the intention of selling your product. In their proper chapters the various processes of plot formation and development are described in detail. Work along those lines unless you chance upon a method that suits you better.

Do not trust too much to the criticism of your friends. They mean well, but they may not know, and the possession of college degrees is no evidence of ability to criticize photoplay. One of the worst scripts that ever came under the observation of this writer was the work of a professor of English literature in one of the largest colleges of the country. His knowledge of literature was profound, his English was classical in its purity, but he did not know photoplay. The minister, the teacher, the newspaper man and the lawyer may each be learned in his profession and yet their opinion of your manuscript be infinitely less worth while than the judgment of the grammar school boy who is an ardent "fan."

If you have made proper advance you are now able to visualize your action, to turn the printed word into motion, but you have this one drawback. You know the story you have written, and you cannot be certain that you have put all of the story into the plot of action. You may read it a dozen times and each time supply some missing point from your memory of the story and think it is in the script. You know that John does this because of some other action. You do not realize that the explanatory action is missing. Get someone to go over it for you. Encourage them to ask questions and do not grow angry if they do.

Write as much as you can, but do not try to market all you write. Send out only the best, retaining the rest to work over. If you cannot better a story by editing and revision, lay it aside until you have done at least two others and the incidents of the first are less clear in your mind. Now read your synopsis and mentally plot it afresh, writing the new action without reference to the old. Now compare the two. You are apt to find some improvement. If you keep at it long enough you will get the story right in time.

As you study and learn from your failures you will come to find that sometimes the story may be all right but the handling is wrong. At times you will find that to give the most important position to the woman instead of the man or vice versa, will be to give the story the right twist. Again you may find that your hero is a doctor instead of a lawyer, or perhaps a clerk instead of his employer. One story was rejected eight times but sold the ninth because on the last trip the hero was an insurance agent instead of a theatrical manager. The theatrical manager did not fit into the rest of the story. The insurance agent did.

Never throw away an idea. Even if you are told that the theme has been used before, do not discard the story. There may be something good in the arrangement or business that you can use with another theme.

There is just one secret of success and that is work, hard faithful work intelligently directed. Every man who today enjoys success has at one time stood where you are standing now. Every Editor, every photoplaywright has at one time been a novice, has met the trials and disappointments of the beginner, has overcome the obstacles and fought his way to success through work. There is not a man in the business who will not ascribe his success to hard work if he is entirely honest. A few of us came up from the start of motion pictures and progressed so gradually that the amount of effort was not realized, but even those who were in the business in the old fifty-foot days and who progressed with the business have worked, but have spread over ten or fifteen years the work you may accomplish in one or two.

This is one point wherein you may receive no help from another. No one can do your work for you, no matter how much you are willing to pay, and no one can think for you nor teach you to think. It is entirely your own effort that will bring you success, but your success will be the sweeter because it has been hardly won. You may be able to think quickly, to use your imagination intelligently and so make more speedy progress than another, you may even gain some measure of success for a time with no very great amount of labor, but no matter how quick you may be to adapt yourself to conditions and produce for a time plots that will please, in the end you will find that there is but one foundation for a real and lasting success and that is hard work. Don't cheat yourself by shirking. If you would be a success, be prepared for work and remember that the sooner you do the preparatory work that must be done, no matter who you may be, the sooner will you gain success.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE UNASKED QUESTION

Things you will want to know explained in detail.

While much of the information contained in this chapter will be found elsewhere in the volume, it is believed that a series of direct questions and answers will be found helpful in resolving doubts and will be additionally useful in enabling the beginner to obtain with the least delay the answer he seeks. The paragraphs are based upon those points most generally asked by the novice.

*How long does the studio keep a script?*

From a day to several months. Different studios have different methods of handling their scripts, and some of these methods involve a considerable period of delay in handling those scripts that are not so very clearly impossible that they are returned immediately.

*How long should I wait before asking about them?*

It is well to wait at least eight weeks before making inquiry of an editor. Some writers wait a full three months.

*Is a delay favorable or unfavorable?*

Generally a delay beyond a couple of weeks means that your manuscript is being held for further consideration, having passed a first reading. A delay is therefore favorable, if not too long continued.

*What should I write in making inquiry?*

Simply ask if they have the script and what the chances of action are. A very good plan is to send a letter something like this:

Editor,  
Planet Film Co.  
Dear Sir:

On May 27th I sent you a drama entitled "The Fate of a Girl." If this has not been received by you will you please advise me that I may make inquiry of the postoffice. If it is being held for consideration may I ask when there is likely to be some action?

This should be accompanied by a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

*What should I do if no reply comes?*

Wait from two to four weeks. Write again, again enclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope. Register the letter and state at the time of registering that you desire a receipt.

*Suppose there is still no reply?*

Notify the company that you withdraw the script, using the form given in Chapter XXII.

*Suppose that they use the script and do not send a check?*

They may have lost your address, or you may have neglected to put it on the script in the first place. Assume this to be the case and write the editor, stating the facts. Enclose the usual stamped and self-addressed envelope. If no reply is returned, write again, addressing the Proprietor or President of the company. If this letter is not replied to, consult a lawyer if you desire, though his fee will probably eat up the check from the company.

*Suppose that my script is returned and the company then makes my story?*

Regret that someone else probably wrote the story more attractively than you did. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred this will be the case.

*To whom should the manuscript be addressed?*

To "The Editor of Photoplays," or to "The Manuscript Department." Scripts should not be addressed to individuals unless your personal friendship with that one addressed warrants you in doing so.

*What does the rejection slip mean?*

Precisely what it generally says. The company cannot use your story for some reason, so it returns it.

*Is it favorable or unfavorable?*

It is neither or both, as you will. It is a favorable sign if the editor adds a word or two of encouragement or suggestion in his own handwriting.

*What does "not available" mean?*

It means that the company cannot use your script. This may be because they have others of similar class, because they use none of that class, or because they do not like it for any one of a thousand possible reasons.

*Should I register my manuscript?*

It is seldom necessary if you use a stout envelope of the proper size. It sometimes delays a script to be registered, and the fact that it is registered will not impress the editor with its worth.

*Do companies give receipts for manuscripts?*

Seldom, if ever, now. The courtesy was abused.

*How may I obtain a receipt?*

By registering the script or by enclosing a return postal.

*If the script is lost will the receipt enable me to collect?*

It will not. All scripts are submitted at author's risk.

*What shall I do if a script is mussed or torn?*

Return it to the company, calling attention to its condition. They will recopy the script if it is their fault. Damage due to poor envelopes will not be repaired, so send the envelope in which the script was received.

*Can I have more than 250 words in my synopsis if I need it?*

Yes, but you should not need more.

*In what tense should the synopsis be written?*

In the present tense. Say "Henry is," not "Henry was."

*About how many words are there in a full reel story?*

As few as you need to tell the action clearly. The reel is not decided by the length of the manuscript either in words or pages, but by the length of action.

*How may I judge the action?*

Roughly by the number of seconds it should take to play the action. The method of the different directors is so varied that there is no certain rule.

*Why should I pay postage both ways when they want scripts?*

They merely advertise their willingness to examine your wares. If there is nothing they want it falls to you to reclaim your property.

*Why do some companies write me they are not buying certain kinds of stories when I see them on the screen?*

Because these stories are purchased from certain authors by special arrangement and not in the open market.

*Why are costume plays rejected?*

Because they involve considerable extra expense of production, and at the same time do not prove as interesting as modern plays, as a rule.

*How can I get the right to make a play from a copyrighted book?*

Address the publishers, stating your desire. It seldom pays to buy copyright rights on speculation.

*What is the meaning of "similar theme used before?"*

It means that someone else has written a story like yours. It does not mean that you are suspected of having used a story by someone else.

*Is it necessary to state the number of leaders and the number of words in each leader and as a whole?*

Some companies advise this, but it is not really necessary. Most scripts will be more or less changed, and your estimate may be

*useless. It is better to leave leaders and words unnumbered.*

*Does a bust count as a scene?*

A bust should be counted as a scene both in numbering the scenes and in counting the total. This is because the camera must be moved to make the bust, and so a number is needed to identify that strip of negative.

*Then why not number the inserts?*

Because the inserts are made by a separate department and do not need the identifying number. In the studio they are marked according to some system, but this does not concern the author.

*What is the precise difference between an insert and a bust?*

An insert shows little or no action. A bust is the magnification of some action.

*Must the passage of time always be marked by a leader?*

Not if the scene or action clearly shows the flight of time, but in most cases it is better to write in a time leader, even if you think that it will be cut out in the studio.

*How many leaders may be used?*

As many as are necessary to make the action clear. The fewer the number of leaders and the shorter the length, other things being equal, the more likely the story is to sell, but you are not limited to any specific number of leaders.

*How many words can I use in a leader?*

There is no limit save that of common sense. The shorter the leader the better, but a twelve-word leader that is clear is to be preferred to one of eight words that lacks explicitness. About twenty words should be the limit unless you think the story will warrant the running of two leaders in succession. This is sometimes, but not very often, done.

*Is a long leader better in letter form?*

Only when the letter can be introduced as a part of the action. Do not have the character suddenly decide to write a letter for no other reason than that you want to tell the audience something. The use of a letter is permissible only when there is a real necessity for giving some other character the information the letter contains.

*When should newspaper paragraphs be introduced?*

Only when there is a legitimate excuse for having some character read or be shown a newspaper.

*Is it necessary to write in all the cut backs?*

Write in a reasonable number of cut backs, as the situation may seem to require, but do not write for the extremist who may use thirty or forty cuts where the average director would use but fifteen or twenty. Be careful to avoid overdoing the cutting back.

*How fully should the description of a scene setting be written?*

It is seldom necessary to use more than two or three words. If you write "Jane's parlor," the director can tell about the sort of parlor Jane would have, but if you actually need a piano, add "with piano" to call attention to the need.

*Should the time of day be added to a scene?*

Not unless you find it necessary to establish the exact time. It is customary to add "tint for night" if the scene takes place in an exterior after dark.

*Will a story with the entire outdoor action happening at night be accepted?*

Not as a rule. The night scene is nothing more than an under-exposed photograph, and an underexposed photograph cannot be a good one.

*Shall I send a letter with my script?*

No. The editor knows you have sent it in for sale.

*May two or more scripts be sent at one time?*

Yes, provided that each script is accompanied by its own return envelope, as some may be held and the others returned.

*Should I mark a price on my script?*

If you wish to. Most authors find it more profitable to leave the price to the editor.

*But suppose that the editor sends me only five or ten dollars?*

Write a courteous note asking if that is the company's regular rate. If it is, do not send more scripts there. If it is not, the editor will tell you why so little was sent. It is better, however, to wait until the second time before querying.

*How may I become a contract writer?*

If it is possible with that studio, you may make a contract after you have proven by the number and frequency of the scripts accepted that you can deliver the goods contracted for.

*Is it desirable to be a contract writer?*

Not as a rule. At the end of your contract it may not be renewed, and you will find that your work is practically unknown to other studios.

*Should I put comedy scenes in a drama?*

It is not recommended. In the stage drama comedy is introduced that the tension may be lightened, since the play runs two or three hours. In the twenty-minute or even three-reel story this is not required.

*How long after acceptance should a story be released?*

Generally in from three to six months. Stories have been held a year or more for production; and some never are produced.

*How may I tell when it is coming out?*

By watching the stories of the films. The title may be changed, but you will probably be able to recognize your story.

*How may I force a manufacturer to produce my story?*

You cannot. Purchase carries with it no promise of production.

*What can I do if a manufacturer changes my story?*

You have no redress. You have sold a story. It becomes the property of the purchaser and he may do with it as he pleases. Not infrequently two stories may be combined into one.

*How may I reserve the rights to make a short story or stage drama of my play?*

By stating on the manuscript that the fiction or dramatic rights, or both, are reserved by the author. Then be careful that, in signing the release slips, this same reservation is made.

*Is this advisable?*

It reduces your chances of a sale almost to nothingness.

*Can I make a hero of my villain?*

Technically you cannot, since your leading character is the hero, no matter what his personal character may be. You may make a criminal your leading character, but this is seldom advisable. It is the general rule of all censorships that evil must be punished. If the criminal is punished, the story has the undesirable happy ending. If he escapes, the censors will object to the story and prevent its circulation in whole or part.

*May a script open with a leader?*

It is often done, but it is not recommended. Many theaters start with the first picture and the leader is lost. In all cases the audience is not yet alert and will not catch the leader.

*Should the author indicate the players he wants in his play?*

This should not be done. The studio will cast the play. To mark in the names of the players will make it necessary to recopy the script.

*Suppose that I write a story for some particular player?*

This should not be done. It is well, however, if a part seems to be particularly suited to some person, to suggest on a separate slip that the part should be found suitable to the person named.

*Should my script be typewritten?*

Invariably, no matter how clear your handwriting may be.

*How may I get my scripts copied?*

Even in the small towns there is some lawyer whose clerk will take copying. In the larger cities there are public stenographers in almost every office building. The magazines devoted to story writing will give the names of copyists.

*How much should this cost?*

About forty cents a thousand words, or ten to twenty cents a page.

*Can I send a story to the same studio more than once?*

There is nothing to prevent you. It is best, however, to call attention to changes made in the story, and state that these are the reasons for sending a second time.

*Do stories ever sell on a second reading?*

Yes, if the changes made better fit it to the uses of the studio to which it is submitted.

*How can I tell what each manufacturer wants?*

Study the stories of the films he has released and read the trade papers.

*Can I sell my stories to foreign manufacturers?*

Probably not. There is an ample supply abroad.

*How should I go about it?*

Obtain the studio addresses and send your manuscript in the language of the country. Enclose one or more International Reply Coupons for the return of the script. These may be had of any post office for six cents each, and are good for stamps to the value of five cents in any country within the Postal Union.

*How do the prices compare?*

Ten or fifteen dollars will be paid for the script that would command fifty over here.

*Will it help to send a script to a player to whom it should particularly appeal instead of to the Editor?*

The players cannot accept scripts nor force their opinions on the Editor.

*Suppose that my script calls for some article that I possess and the studio is not likely to have. Should it be sent with the script?*

Simply state that you have such an article and will be pleased to loan it on request. Do not send it until you are positively asked for it.

*Can I use a title someone else has used?*

You can, but it is a bad practice.

*If the purchaser of my script gives the story another title, may I use the one I suggested?*

If you wish. The original purchaser has discarded the title.

*Is there any stated period that must elapse before I send another story to the studio to which one has been sent?*

There is no limit to the scripts that may be sent to one studio, but it is best not to send too many to one place; perhaps not more than two a week.

*Is it necessary to draw diagrams of the stage settings?*

Do not send diagrams of any sort.

*Should I write the leaders and inserts in red ink?*

Most editors prefer an all-black ribbon.

*Should I single or double space?*

It is best to single space scenes and use a double space between scenes, between scenes and leaders, and between parts of scenes and an insert.

*Can I have part of the action occur in a foreign country?*

It can be done without much trouble if the foreign action is held to inside scenes, or very simple landscapes, but city streets or country houses or villages will not be convincing.

*Do they have to wait until it rains to make pictures in the rain?*

Sometimes a sprinkler system is used.

*Will it help to send post card pictures or photographs that look like the scenes I want?*

Nothing of this sort should be sent. The director will do the best he can with what is at hand.

*Can I write a series of stories about the same character and sell them to different studios if one will not take them all?*

This may be done if the stories are not too much alike, but it would be better to change the name of the character.

*Can anyone contribute to a series of stories?*

Anyone can offer stories that will fit a series, but generally these series plays are written by one or more authors in close touch with the studio.

*Will it help me to take a course in acting for motion pictures?*  
It will not be of any assistance. Practically all of these schools are frauds.

*Is it better for a woman to use a masculine pen name?*

This is not necessary. Some of the best paid and most prolific writers are women. There is no preference shown.

*Is it best to let an agent handle my manuscripts?*

It is better that you sell your scripts direct. In many studios there is a prejudice against the agent, and in none is the agent favored.

*Will it pay to hire someone to revise my scripts?*

It will not pay. Revision may put your idea into better technical form, but it will not better the idea, and it is the idea that is the principal factor in a sale.

*If, after I have sent out a script, I think of a better way of ending the story, should I write and tell the editor?*

No. If the script sells, you will not need to change . If it is returned, you can make the change after it comes back.

*Should I send a letter and a script in the same envelope?*

That depends on the nature of the letter. If you have to write

a letter about the script you are sending, place it in the envelope with the script. If you are writing the editor on another matter, use another envelope. It may be a week before your script envelope is opened. A script and a letter relating thereto should never be sent under separate covers.

*What sort of scripts sell best?*

There is a demand for all sorts. Comedy of the right sort commands the most steady market, with a real heart-interest story next, and then melodrama. The market varies from time to time, but this is the general rule.

*When should dialogue be used?*

When a single speech will convey more than an equal number of words of action.

*If two or more consecutive scenes are played in the same set, should each scene be numbered?*

Each scene must be numbered in its proper order. Two or more scenes in succession in the same set will be broken by leaders, and so each scene must have a number by which it may be identified.

*Can I show parts of two rooms at the same time?*

This can be done, but it should be remembered that in such a case each room will have only half of the stage width and that the action must all happen close to the walls. It would be better to use the cut back from one room to the other.

*If I want a trick scene is it sufficient to tell what I want, or must I explain how it can be done?*

Ask for what you want and leave it to the director and the cameraman, but remember that it is not a good plan to use much trick work, since this means considerable trouble. Be certain that the result will warrant the trouble.

*Why should I cut a long scene into two through the use of some other scene?*

Because the spectator grows tired of action too long continued in one spot, even when the action itself is interesting.

*Must I supply pen copies of the letters used in my play?*

No. Put the text of the letter into the script at the proper place. The letter will be written in the studio with india ink and on the proper sort of paper.

*How many times may a script be sent out?*

As many times as there are companies likely to be able to use it, but after three or four submissions the repeated return should suggest to you that the script is not right and needs revision.

*What does first run script mean?*

First run script means that you send all of your stories to one

particular studio in accordance with an arrangement already made with them whereby you are given a little better price than usual because they are given first choice.

*How may I make my scripts first run?*

By sending in such good stories that a studio will be anxious to get first pick of your product. Generally a year or more is required to accomplish this result.

*Can I put my story out on royalty?*

This is very occasionally done in the case of state rights features, but practically never in the case of regular releases.

*Why cannot this be done?*

It would involve too much bookkeeping and to some extent reveal the volume of the manufacturer's business to outsiders.

*Can I locate my story in a machine shop, a mill or other similar place?*

This may be done, but it is best not to be too specific. Do not ask for a knitting mill when a box factory will do as well, because it may be possible to get a well-lighted box factory, where to use a knitting mill would involve considerable expense in the transportation of the special lights used in picture making and setting these up.

*If a character assumes an alias, should this alias be employed to show that he is disguised?*

Make it plain in the action that he is disguised, but keep on calling him by the name first used. If your hero is John Jones, do not call him John or Jones indiscriminately. Call him either John or Jones and stick to that selection throughout.

*What does it mean when I receive a script without even a rejection slip?*

It either means that they are out of slips at the moment or else that they forgot to put one in.

*If I have more than one good title for a play should I send the others?*

You may, but it is the better plan to use only one title and write other plays to fit the other titles. Often a title will give you the idea for a play entirely different from the one to which it was first applied.

*What is a director's sheet?*

It is a list of scenes with a word or two describing the action in each. It is a term seemingly invented by a man writing about an unfamiliar subject. Where such a memorandum of the action is employed, it is written by the director for his convenience, and not by the author.

*Why cannot I sell all that I write?*

Because no author invariably writes a good story.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## TECHNICAL TERMS

**Terminology of the studio—definitions of the phrases of the studio and new meanings given words in common use.**

While most of the terms used in this book are explained and illustrated at the time of their first use, a glossary may be found useful at times. Various studios have their own terms, invented in default of an established terminology. In some studios, for instance, a photograph made with an ordinary camera for the use of the press department is called a "still" meaning that it is made without action. In other studios it is called a "flat" and in some few a "regular," but the use of the terms given below is understandable to all studios and are the ones in most general use:

**Action**—(a) Any gesture performed by the player. (b) The various actions of individual players whereby the narrative is advanced.

—, plot of—All the action of a play properly divided into scenes and with leaders and inserts written in.

**Business**—The action of the player. ("Business of untying rope"—the action of untying the rope.)

**Break**—Interrupting the scene to prevent long action or showing forbidden matter.

**Bust**—A small section of a scene magnified by bringing the camera closer to the object photographed.

**By-play**—Minor action of the players not essential to the relation of the story. Business generally refers to the essential action, and by-play to the non-essential.

**Cast**—A list of the characters employed in a play.

**Climax**—The ultimate end of the action, the most impressive moment of the play. The point at which all the narrative has been directed. An anti-climax is a previous action of greater strength than the incident which ends the play and so robs the true climax of its impressiveness.

**Close-up**—Same as *Bust* or close action.

**Comedy**—A play in which the element of humor is dominant—an amusing play lacking serious purpose or story.

**Crisis**—A critical moment in the development of the narrative but not as important as the climax. If of equal or greater importance, the crisis becomes an anti-climax.

*Cutting*—(a) Eliminating useless portions of the film: editing.  
(b) Dividing a scene for the purpose of inserting leader or other matter.

*—— room*—A room supplied with projection machine and screen where the prints are run through and the matter to be eliminated is decided upon.

*Cut-back*—Repeated returns to a scene or character after interpolated scenes of related action.

*Denouement*—The climax of a play; the end at which the action has been directed. The natural consequence of the preceding action.

*Development*—of plot—The elaboration of the start or leading action into a complete series of incidents.

*—— of film*—The immersing of the film in a solution which brings out the picture, through the action of chemicals on the silver in the emulsion.

*Director*—One who produces photoplays, directing the preparation and action.

*Dissolve*—The gradual introduction or withdrawal of a character from a scene by means of double exposure and stopping down.

*Double*—exposure. The exposure of the same negative film twice.

*—— printing*—Exposing the same piece of film behind two negatives in succession, impressing a double figure on the sensitive emulsion.

*Drama*—In general any form of stage play. In photoplay the word is applied only to serious plays.

*Editor*—A person employed to select plays and prepare them for production.

*Educational*—A film possessing an educational as well as entertaining value as pictures of industries, foreign people, etc.

*Exterior*—A scene in which the action is laid outdoors.

*Fade*—Dissolving the end of one scene into the commencement of the next by means of double exposure and opening or closing the diaphragm.

*Farce*—The broadest form of comedy; a comedy in which absolute probability is subordinate to the creation of comedy action and situations.

*—— comedy*—A play not so broad as farce, yet livelier than high comedy.

*Flash*—A few feet only of a scene or insert; a fleeting glimpse.

*Flat*—A piece of scenery stretched upon a framework of wood.

*Frame*—Each single picture on a film.

*Insert*—Any matter, not leader, inserted in the film, as reproductions of letters or newspapers, small objects, etc.

*Interior*—A scene played within a house or other structure.

*Joining*—cementing together the various parts of a film.

—room—A department where the several scenes are assembled or cemented together into a complete reel.

*Lead*—A character most prominent in a play, generally a man and a woman.

*Leader*—A printed legend conveying some explanation not possible to give in action.

—cut in—A leader cut into or inserted between two parts of a scene instead of placed between scenes.

*Lines*—Real or imaginary lines defining the angle of the lens and therefore all that part of the stage in the field of the camera.

*Location*—Any exterior in which a scene is played.

*Magazine*—Light-tight boxes used for holding film in the camera.

Fireproof boxes used for holding film in the projection machine.

*Make-up*—The various materials with which the players change their appearance.

*Manuscript*—The written play, consisting of a synopsis, cast and plot of action with leaders and inserts.

*Mask*—Metal cut-outs used for shielding parts of the film from exposure or giving certain shapes to the picture.

*Master plot*—The last reduction of a plot of a story. The base from which many variations may spring.

*Match*—Planning the action at the end of one scene to correspond to that in the opening of the next, as a person passing from one room to another.

*Mss.*—The abbreviation for manuscript.

*Multiple reel*—A story requiring more than one reel for its complete action.

*Negative*—The film which has been exposed in the camera and then developed, giving white as black and the reverse.

*Opposite*—The player with whom a character has most to do. The heroine plays opposite the hero, the juvenile opposite the ingenue, etc.

*Panoram*—A contraction of panorama or panoramic. Moving the camera up and down or from side to side to follow the action across the lines.

*Photographic stage*—A small section of the full stage nearest to the camera on which all important action should be played.

A space about six by four feet.

*Plot*—The skeleton of a story. The motive.

—of action. The action divided into scenes.

*Plot*—property—A list of all objects required in producing a certain play.

\_\_\_\_\_, scene—A list of all scenes and locations required in the production of a certain play.

*Positive*—A film exposed behind a negative and then developed, rendering the proper values in white and black.

*Printing*—Passing positive and negative film together through a machine which exposes the positive film through the negative.

*Producer*—One who produces pictures. See *Director*.

*Properties*—All articles required for use in a play.

*Punch*—That quality of the plot that forcefully impresses the spectator. The mental suggestion that renders physical action impressive.

*Reconstruction*—The revision of a manuscript to suit the particular purposes of the studio making the production.

*Reel*—(a) One or more subjects aggregating approximately one thousand feet. (b) The spool on which film is wound.

*Release*—One or more subjects, a full reel, issued by a manufacturer as a complete offering.

\_\_\_\_\_, day—Stated days on which manufacturers release or publish their products (Monday, Thursday and Saturday are the Biograph release days. Imp makes three releases each week.)

*Retake*—Making over a scene because of some defect in the first.

*Scenario*—Once erroneously applied to the photoplay script. A condensed sketch of the action of a play.

*Scene*—(a) All of the action of a play that is taken in one spot at one time without stopping of the camera. (b) A complete stage setting.

*Script*—Same as manuscript.

*Set*—A combination of parts of scenery presenting the aspect of an interior or exterior.

*Splice*—To join two pieces of film by cementing them together.

*Split reel*—A thousand feet of film, containing two or more subjects.

*Still*—A photograph made with a regular camera for the use of the advertising department.

*Studio*—A place where pictures are made. A daylight studio has a glass roof and sides. An electric studio is one where pictures are made by artificial light.

*Sub-title*—Same as Leader.

*Switch-back*—Same as Cut-back.

**Synopsis**—A brief resume of the story or its salient points, enabling the Editor to get an idea of the story without reading the entire script.

**Title**—The name or caption given a play.

**Tinting**—Dyeing the film in various colors to suggest moonlight, lamplight, firelight, etc.

**Trick**—Any effect not gained through straight photography.

**Turning**—Operating the crank of the camera and causing the mechanism to pass film through the box behind the lense.

**Vision**—A small scene shown as part of a full frame, the remainder being given to the main action.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### COMPLETE ACTION

**Two sample scripts showing the action developed to the highest reasonable point—the extreme of fullness.**

Throughout this book the examples show a development that is recommended as being sufficiently full to give a producer all the needful information, but for the purpose of comparison we present in this chapter two studio scripts, one a drama, the other a light comedy, written by Lawrence S. McCloskey, Editor for the Lubin Manufacturing Company and produced by that company. This form should be followed where an Editor or producer particularly requests a "full script."

#### FRIEND JOHN.

By Lawrence S. McCloskey.

**Synopsis.**

**Time**--Present.

**Place**--Quaker Village in Pennsylvania.

John Franklin, a stolid Quaker, devotes his simple life to the Lord and horses--worshipping the former, shoeing the latter. His sister, Priscella, is housekeeper. In the depths of John's big, simple heart, love is growing for Ruth, daughter

of the Rogers--staunch Quakers all. Howard Clark, an idle, rich young man, while autoing through the village, sees the pretty and demure young Quakeress, and resolves to see more of her. He makes it his business to become acquainted, and when she chides him for his reckless, sinful way, he tells her that he would reform if she would help him. The girl is seized with the idea that the Lord has sent this man to her to be saved and she resolves to perform her mission. In the course of their talks she falls in love with the reckless, young fellow, and when he asks her to elope with him she does so, partly because she loves him, but more because she thinks it her duty to save his soul. The elopement causes grief to the old folks. John's big heart is torn, but his grief is silent. Clark marries Ruth, and they live happily for a while at his home in the city. But, although Clark loves his little wife, he goes back to his old ways, and because Ruth clings to her old-fashioned ways and does not make free with his pleasure-loving friends he becomes ashamed of her and neglects her. Even his discovery of baby clothes, which Ruth is sewing, fails to soften him. At last, lonely and miserable, Ruth, seeking love and sympathy, returns to her home. There her father's harsh words anger her, and, although he does not refuse her admittance, she is too proud to accept his charity. From his blacksmith shop John sees Ruth staggering in the road. He takes her into his house, where she sobs out her story to John and his sister. In righteous wrath John hastens to the city. He finds Ruth's husband in the midst of midnight revelry. In front of all the guests John drags Clark from the house and forces him to return to the village. When they arrive they find that the stork has gotten there ahead of them. Ruth has a baby. The little mite awakens in Ruth's husband all the manhood that has been slumbering, and when the happy family later return to their city home Friend John at his forge is comforted in knowing that Ruth is happy.

## CAST.

JOHN FRANKLIN----(Blacksmith)-----

PRISCILLA----- (John's sister) -----

RUTH-----

RUTH'S FATHER-----

RUTH'S MOTHER-----

HOWARD CLARK-----

Chauffeur

Butler

Number of Quakers.

Guests of Clark.

## FRIEND JOHN.

Scene Plot.

## INTERIORS.

Blacksmith Shop (studio set)- 6

Kitchen in John's Home- 8-32-39

Bedroom in John's Home- 37-40

Parlor in Ruth's Home- 15

Dining Room in Ruth's Home- 17-18

Living Room- Howard's Apartments- 21-23-25-27-34-36

Bedroom- Howard's Apartments- 24-26

Hallway- Howard's Apartments (small set- camera close up)  
33-35

## EXTERIORS.

Friends' Meeting House- 1

Road Scenes- 2-3-4-9-11-29-31

Crossroads- 12-16-19

Ruth's Home (Small Farm)- 5-13-28-41

Blacksmith Shop- 7-10-20-22-30-38-42

## FRIEND JOHN.

By Lawrence S. McCloskey.

Leader- JOHN FRANKLIN AND HIS SISTER PRISCELLA.

Scene 1- EXTERIOR FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE.

Quakers coming out of meeting house- John and sister in foreground- Ruth, Ruth's father and Ruth's mother on from rear- sober greetings (a Quaker never tips his hat)- John steals sly glances at Ruth- she looks at him- drops her eyes demurely- Ruth and family off- John steals another glance after Ruth- his sister smiles knowingly- then remembers it ill behooves a man to think of a maid on the Sabbath- she pulls his sleeve- he starts guiltily- they walk off in opposite direction from Ruth.

Scene 2- ROAD.

Ruth, father and mother walking towards camera- Howard and party of young men approach in auto- waving hats and singing- blow horn- Ruth and family hastily step aside to allow auto to pass- as it passes Howard leans over side and gets good look at Ruth- father and mother raise hands in horror at young man's desecration of Sabbath day.

## Scene 3- ROAD.

(Flash) Camera close up- show Howard looking back at Ruth over side of speeding auto- he registers "She's a peach- I'll come back and look her up"- other fellows not paying any attention to Howard.

## Scene 4- Back to No. 2 (ROAD)

Ruth annoyed at auto party- father and mother shake heads in solemn disapproval- all walk off.

Leader- LATER.

## Scene 5- EXTERIOR RUTH'S HOME (Small farm)

Horse and small open wagon standing in road- Ruth climbing into wagon- father examining horse's hoofs- tells Ruth to have horse shod- mother on from house with basket of eggs- hands them to Ruth- Ruth drives off.

## Scene 6- INTERIOR BLACKSMITH SHOP (Set in studio- dim light)

John at anvil hammering red-hot horseshoe- helper pumping bellows flames throw high lights on John's face- John hears team drive up outside shop- sees Ruth- smiles and exits to meet her.

## Scene 7- EXTERIOR BLACKSMITH SHOP (John's house or gate to yard at side)- Sign, John Franklin, Blacksmith.

Ruth drives up and gets out of wagon- John on from shop- greets Ruth- clumsy attempt to make love- she laughs at him- he attempts to take her hand, at which she tells him horse is to be shod- John's sister on from road- just home from market (basket on arm)- Ruth takes her eggs from wagon- says they are a present from mother- sister invites her into house- both go through gate- sister smiling at Ruth and John- John disappointed at interruption, but calls helper from shop- they commence to unhitch horse.

## Scene 8- KITCHEN IN JOHN'S HOME.

John's sister and Ruth on- begin to unpack baskets- conversation- sister looks at Ruth- then out at John- tells Ruth John loves her- Ruth confused.

Leader- CLARK RETURNS TO LOOK FOR THE PRETTY QUAKERESS.

## Scene 9- ROAD.

(Flash) Howard in auto (driven by chauffeur) looking right and left.

## Scene 10- EXTERIOR BLACKSMITH SHOP.

Ruth in wagon ready to drive away- John inspecting new shoes he has just put on horse's feet- sister saying goodbye to Ruth- Ruth says goodby to John and drives off- John looks after her wistfully- sister accuses him of loving Ruth- he admits it bashfully.

## Scene 11- ROAD.

Howard in auto spies Ruth in distance- orders chauffeur to drive on- auto off.

## Scene 12- CROSSROADS.

Ruth on in wagon, suddenly pulls horse up- Howard's auto on, stops abruptly so as to block middle of road (but leave room for wagon to pass at edge of road).

## Cut in- HE PRETENDS A BREAKDOWN.

Chauffeur gets out and under car- reports something out of order- Howard appears to be annoyed (but winks at chauffeur)- gets out of auto- comes to Ruth and apologizes for holding her up- she supposes he cannot help it- he attempts familiarity- she reprimands him severely.

## Cut in- "THY WAYS ARE SINFUL AND THEE HAD BETTER REFORM."

Howard pretends to take her words to heart, but he soon has her blushing at his compliments.

## Scene 13- EXTERIOR RUTH'S HOME.

(Flash) Father looking down road- sees Ruth talking to stranger- decides to investigate- off towards them.

## Scene 14- Back to No. 12 (ROAD).

Howard talking to Ruth- Ruth's father on- Ruth introduces Howard- explains about auto.

## Cut in- THE HOSPITABLE QUAKER INVITES THE STRANGER TO HIS HOME UNTIL THE AUTO IS REPAIRED.

Ruth's father invites Howard to house- leads horse around auto while Howard talks to chauffeur, who is tinkering at auto- Howard tells him to be a long while repairing the car- they exchange winks- Howard hurries off after Ruth and father.

## Leader- "THE LORD HAS SENT THEE TO ME THAT I MAY INSTRUCT THEE IN HIS WAYS."

## Scene 15- PARLOR IN RUTH'S HOME (glimpse of dining room through door- mother setting table).

Ruth and Howard side by side- she has open Bible- says above (subtitle)- begins to read passage from Bible- Howard not much impressed with words from Bible, but is admiring Ruth- mother looks in from other room- hears Ruth reading- smiles approvingly and withdraws.

## Scene 16- CROSSROADS (Night).

(Flash) Chauffeur walking up and down beside auto- waiting impatiently for Howard- looks at watch, etc.- goes towards house.

## Scene 17- DINING ROOM, RUTH'S HOME.

Mother has supper ready- father on, farmwork finished- asks for Ruth- mother indicates parlor- father frowns, but approves [when] mother tells him Ruth is reading Bible to Howard- [mother calls into parlor that supper is ready- Ruth and Howard on- knock at door- father off- on again with chauffeur, who tells Howard auto is ready- he is invited to sit at table- all sit to supper..

Leader- LATER- RUTH HAS FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER PUPIL.

## Scene 18- DINING ROOM IN RUTH'S HOME, 9 P. M.

Mother and father going to bed- Ruth sewing- they ask if she isn't going to bed- she says after she finishes her sewing- they go off to bed- Ruth takes note from dress.

Insert- NOTE-

"Dear Ruth:

"Marry me and I will be a good man. If you refuse I will go to the devil and you will be responsible. I will be at the crossroads at nine o'clock.

"HOWARD CLARK."

Ruth struggles with her conscience- her love for John, etc.- she decides that her duty lies in saving Howard's soul- her face lights up- gets paper and pencil (or pen and ink)- writes note.

Insert- NOTE-

"Father and Mother:

"I am going to save a man's soul. We shall be married immediately, and when he has accepted our faith we will come to see thee." RUTH."

Ruth leaves note on table- gets wraps and leaves.

## Scene 19- CROSSROADS- (Night)

(Short Scene) Howard waiting impatiently beside auto- sees Ruth coming- Ruth on- he attempts embrace- she reminds him they are not yet married- both get into auto- chauffeur drives auto off.

Leader- NEXT MORNING.

## Scene 20- EXTERIOR BLACKSMITH'S SHOP.

Very early in the morning- John comes on from gate of his house- begins to open up his shop- Ruth's father drives on in wagon very much excited- gets out of wagon- tells John of elopement, etc.- shows him note.

Insert- NOTE- Same as in scene 18.

John staggered- heartbroken, etc.- father terribly angry- denounces Ruth- John restrains him.

Leader- MARRIED.

Scene 21- LIVING ROOM- Howard's Apartments- door to bedroom down right or left- Howard showing Ruth around- she somewhat agast at richness of things- she says so much luxury is sinful, and he'll have to do away with some of the pictures, etc.- he takes her in his arms and says they'll talk about that later.

Scene 22- INTERIOR BLACKSMITH SHOP.

(Flash) John at his anvil- hammering horseshoe- stops and looks off- grief on his face.

Leader- THE REFORMATION A FAILURE.

Scene 23- HOWARD'S APARTMENTS.

Gay crowd of men and women present- drinking, singing, etc.- Howard down front having a good time.

Scene 24- BEDROOM IN HOWARD'S APARTMENTS- Clock at 11.

(Flash) Ruth discovered asleep in chair, simple loose gown, lonesome and miserable- hears raucous singing of Howard's guests- awakens her- puts hands to ears- decides to call Howard- exits.

Scene 25- Back to 23.

Howard near door- guests still singing- Ruth on from bedroom door- very timid- tugs Howard's sleeve- he annoyed- she asks him to come into bedroom- he annoyed, but exits with her- guests nudge each other and titter.

Scene 26- Back to 24 (BEDROOM).

Ruth and Howard on- she chides him timidly about sinful festivities- asks him to dismiss guests- (points to clock)- he answers impatiently- she picks up baby garment and shows it to him- it makes no impression- Howard exits- Ruth cries.

Leader- "IF YOU DON'T LIKE MY WAYS, GO LIVE YOUR OWN."

Scene 27- LIVING ROOM, HOWARD'S APARTMENTS.

Butler helping Howard on with overcoat- butler off- Howard dressed for street- Ruth begging him to stay home- he says (above subtitle)- hurries out without kissing Ruth- she brokenhearted- goes into bedroom- on again dressed for street- she steals out.

Scene 28- EXTERIOR RUTH'S HOME.

Ruth on, slowly- mother comes out of house, broom in her hand- about to sweep porch when she sees Ruth- rushes to her- helps her toward house- father appears around side of house- orders Ruth to leave- mother and Ruth

plead, but in vain- father says something at which Ruth takes offence- she walks off proudly.

Scene 29- ROAD (VICINITY JOHN'S SHOP).

Ruth walks slowly- staggers.

Scene 30- INTERIOR BLACKSMITH SHOP.

John at work- looks out door- sees Ruth- exits.

Scene 31- Back to 29.

Rmth about to sink, exhausted- John on- supports her off scene.

Scene 32- INTERIOR JOHN' HOME.

John's sister ironing- John brings Ruth in- she sobs out her story- John asks where her husband lives- she tells- sister helps her off scene- John gets hat and coat- determines to find Ruth's husband- registers wrath- exits.

Leader- JOHN ARRIVES IN TOWN.

Scene 33- HALLWAY IN HOWARD'S APARTMENTS- (Camera close up to avoid big set) John wants to see Howard- servant tells him to wait until he asks Howard- servant off- John impatient.

Scene 34- LIVING ROOM, HOWARD'S APARTMENTS.

Another party on- Howard down front- half soosed- servant on- tells him a Quaker wants to see him- Howard doesn't want to see any Quaker- servant off.

Scene 35- Back to 33 (HALLWAY).

Servant on- tells John Howard won't see him- John angry- starts to go in- servant interposes- John flings him aside and exits.

Scene 36- (Back to 34) LIVING ROOM.

John enters- guests stand still, etc.- John comes to Howard- proceeds to lecture him- guests begin to laugh- Howard orders John out- John looks Howard square in the eye and says:

Cut in- "I AM GOING TO TAKE THEE TO THY WIFE!"

John grabs Howard- other men going to interfere- servant draws revolver- John leaps on him and takes it away from him- holds them all up and forces Howard to exit with him.

Scene 37- BEDROOM IN JOHN'S HOME.

Ruth in bed- Quaker doctor in attendance- John's sister bustling about at doctor's orders.

**Scene 38- EXTERIOR OF JOHN'S HOME AND SHOP.**

Doctor's carriage standing- auto on- John pointing gun alternately at Howard and chauffeur- John and Howard out and exit towards house.

**Scene 39- KITCHEN, JOHN'S HOME.**

John brings Howard in- Howard recovering from souse- bewildered- John's sister on- all excited- stops surprised at sight of Howard and John- tells them Ruth has a baby- Howard gets new look on face- exits towards bedroom-sister follows him- John remains- wistful look on face, etc.

**Scene 40- BEDROOM IN JOHN'S HOME.**

Ruth and baby in bed- doctor ready to leave- Howard on- John's sister after him- stops in background- Howard pulls transformation scene- kneels at bed, cries, etc.- asks Ruth's forgiveness- she gives it- doctor and sister exit quietly.

Leader- LATER.

**Scene 41- EXTERIOR RUTH'S HOME.**

Howard and Ruth with baby in auto, bidding goodby to Ruth's father and mother- drive off and old folks gaze after them.

**Scene 42- EXTERIOR BLACKSMITH SHOP.**

Auto on and stops- John on from shop- sister on from house- goodbyes- auto drives off- sister goes back to gate- looking after auto- John gazing wistfully after auto- sighs- fade out.

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**AUNTIE'S AFFINITY.**

Lang-Walters comedy-----By Lawrence S. McCloskey.

**Synopsis.**

Ethel and her Aunt Amanda live at the Hotel Borden. Ethel is in love with Harry, son of the hotel's proprietor. Aunt Amanda forbids Ethel to ride in Harry's auto, so one day Ethel pleads a headache and Aunt Amanda goes alone for her daily walk in the park. Ethel steals off for a spin in Harry's auto.

Pietro, the portly and handsome chef of the hotel, also goes walking in the park. He dresses well and makes an impression on Aunt Amanda when he rescues her pocketbook in the park. Each is ignorant of the other's identity. The two meet often by appointment. Pietro tells Aunt Amanda that he is the Count of Montividio, and she believes him. He buys an engagement ring, but loses it during excitement in the kitchen.

## TECHNIQUE OF THE PHOTOPLAY

The ring turns up in Ethel's plum pudding. Peitro is exposed and discharged. Aunt Amanda is heartbroken. During the excitement Ethel and Harry elope.

But it all turns out well when when Peitro shows up with an official letter signed by the Italian Consul, certifying that Peitro is the really truly Count of Montividio and heir to a vast fortune.

## CAST.

PEITRO LANGORI (the Chef) -----

AUNT AMANDA-----

ETHEL-----

HARRY-----

HARRY'S FATHER-----

Guests, Bellboys, Cooks and Waiters.

## Scene Plot.

## INTERIORS.

Hotel Kitchen-1-6-12-20-22-26-30-32-35.

Hotel Office-2-4-7-9-19-28-34-36-37-41.

Hotel Dining Room-3-5-31-33.

Sitting Room (suite) -8-10-21-27-29-39-42.

## EXTERIORS.

Front of Hotel-11-13-18-38-40.

Front of Jewelry Store-25.

First Park Scene-14.

Second Park Scene-15.

Third Park Scene-16-17-23-24.

## AUNTIE'S AFFINITY.

Lang-Walters comedy-----By Lawrence S. McCloskey.

Leader- THE CHEF OF THE HOTEL BORDEN.

Scene 1- KITCHEN OF THE HOTEL BORDEN- Well appointed, as becomes a first-class hotel.

Peitro, the chef, in his white cap and apron, bossing a number of cooks and scullions- in his hand is a large spoon- he tastes soup and other things cooking on the big range- some please him- some do not- he orders more salt in some of the pots, etc.- makes cooks jump lively, and otherwise shows he is "boss around here."

Leader- THE PROPRIETOR AND HIS SON.

Scene 2- OFFICE AND LOBBY OF HOTEL- Quiet but elegant atmosphere- elevator glimpse of dining room.

Harry and his father talking at counter- lady and gentleman on- ask to look at apartments- father takes keys from rack- conducts them to elevator- leaves Harry in charge of office- elevator door opens- Aunt Amanda and Ethel on from elevator- father, lady and gent exit into elevator- boy closes door and elevator ascends- (light worked behind door.)

Cut in- ETHEL AND HER AUNT AMANDA, WHO LIVE AT THE HOTEL.

Ethel and Aunt are on their way to the dining room to dinner- Harry's face lights up at sight of Ethel- Aunt goes off towards dining room- motioning Ethel to stop at counter and see if there's any mail- Ethel asks Harry for mail- she smiles very coyly- Harry takes letter from box- when he hands it to her he catches hold of her hand across the counter- retains it- she makes a feeble attempt to escape- looks off to make sure Aunt Amanda has disappeared- turns and begins intimate conversation with Harry- the two heads get closer and closer.

Scene 3- DINING ROOM, HOTEL BORDEN (Well filled with patrons.)

(Flash) Aunt Amanda seated at table, wondering what can be keeping Ethel- waiter comes for order- Aunt Amanda says wait- she'll have to look for her niece- she rises and exits towards office impatiently.

Scene 4- Back to 2 (HOTEL OFFICE).

Ethel and Harry leaning over counter, gazing into each other's eyes- unconscious of everything but each other- Aunt Amanda on from dining room- shocked at Ethel- speaks and Ethel jumps- Aunt Amanda scolds (in dignified manner- not farce) and tells Ethel to go into the dining room- Ethel hands her letter and exits to dining room- Aunt looks haughty disapproval at Harry- he is respectful but not apologetic- tries to smooth the old lady- she turns her back and follows Ethel to the dining room (Other guests, bellboys, etc., pass, get into elevator, etc., during scene).

Scene 5- DINING ROOM.

(Flash) Ethel and Aunt Amanda enter from office- Aunt Amanda warning Ethel not to have anything to do with "that crazy boy"- Ethel says he is fine young man, etc.- waiter comes for order- hands menu cards to the ladies- they begin to look them over.

Leader- THE CHEF'S BUSY HOUR.

**Scene 6- KITCHEN.**

Wild excitement- waiters, cooks, scullions, etc., dash about- waiters with trays filling orders for dining room- Peitro, the chef, bawling orders- waving spoon- little man (one of the cooks) rebels when Peitro tells him his soup is awful, and orders him to put salt in it- cook attempts to argue with Pete- Pete takes him by the scruff of the neck and throws him off scene- turns and orders another man on the soup job (no one pays attention to Pete's scrap with the ejected cook; it's an everyday occurrence, and besides all are too busy to notice others troubles).

Leader- NEXT AFTERNOON- "WILL YOU TAKE A SPIN IN MY NEW CAR?"

**Scene 7- HOTEL OFFICE (Camera close up).**

(Flash) Clerk sorting letters, Harry smiling and talking over phone (asks the above leader).

**Scene 8- SITTING ROOM IN SUITE OF ETHEL AND AUNT- (Glimpse of bedroom).**

(Flash) Ethel smiling and talking over phone to Harry- says she'll try to steal off somehow and meet him.

**Scene 9- HOTEL OFFICE.**

(Flash) Harry kisses Ethel via the phone.

**Scene 10- SITTING ROOM.**

Ethel sends Harry a phone kiss and hangs up quickly as she hears Aunt Amanda coming- Aunt on from bedroom- dressed for street- says she is ready for walk- asks Ethel to accompany her- Ethel pleads headache and says she'd rather stay home and lie down- Aunt sympathizes, wants to stay and tend to Ethel- Ethel says Aunt must not deny herself her walk- she will feel better after a little nap- Aunt goes out- Ethel quickly gets hat and coat, picks up phone to tell Harry she will be ready in a moment.

**Scene 11- EXTERIOR FRONT OF HOTEL.**

(Flash) Aunt Amanda on from hotel- attendant asks if she wants taxi- no, thanks, she'd rather walk- walks off up street.

Leader- THE CHEF ALSO GOES FOR A WALK.

**Scene 12- KITCHEN.**

The fires are low- it is the dullest time of the day in the kitchen- only a servant or two in sight- they are cleaning and polishing up- Pete on- well dressed- cane in his hand- overcoat on arm- servant helps him on with overcoat- Pete scrutinizes work of cleaners- discovers part of range not polished properly- calls attention to

it- servants make haste to polish- Pete gives a few directions and exits.

Scene 13- EXTERIOR FRONT OF HOTEL.

(Flash) Harry cranking his auto- Ethel on from hotel- greetings- they get into auto and drive off.

Scenes 14- PARK SCENE 1.

(Flash) Aunt Amanda on- walks across scene.

Scene 15- PARK SCENE 2.

(Flash) Harry and Ethel in auto driving at breakneck speed- people exclaim- park policeman runs on, shouting at them to stop- tries to see number- no use.

Scene 16- PARK SCENE 3.

Aunt Amanda, slightly fatigued, sits on bench to rest- Harry and Ethel dash past in auto- Aunt Amanda starts to feet with exclamation- her pocketbook falls to ground- when she has calmed down she tries to pick it up- rather difficult- Pete on, walking jauntily- sees Aunt Amanda trying to get pocketbook- comes gallantly to the rescue- he is so stout he has to get down on his knees for the pocketbook, but he gets it and presents it with a flourish to Aunt Amanda- she thanks him graciously- he is encouraged to linger and remark the fine weather- she is captivated by his dash and courtly bearing- pleasant conversation begins.

Leader- EACH IGNORANT OF THE OTHER'S IDENTITY.

Scene 17- Same as 16 (PARK SCENE 3)

Aunt Amanda and Pete very good friends now- he pays her some compliment- she smiles coyly- Pete becomes real kittenish- Aunt Amanda asks the time- Pete flashes his heavy gold watch- four o'clock- Aunt Amanda must be going- won't Pete walk with her a little way?- delighted- he offers his arm- she takes it and they walk off.

Scene 18- EXTERIOR FRONT OF HOTEL.

Pete and Aunt Amanda on- he is surprised when he learns she lives at the hotel- won't he come into the parlor for a while?- Pete is afraid of being recognised by some of the employees- suddenly looks at watch and remembers an engagement- can't go in with her, but will she meet him in the park to-morrow?- same time and place?- she bashfully promises- exits into hotel- Pete off other way- Harry and Ethel dash up in auto- Harry helps Ethel to alight- she is worried- whether Aunt has returned and found her headache story a fib- Harry tells her not to worry- he calls attendant- orders him to take his car to the garage- Harry and Ethel exit into hotel.

**Scene 19- HOTEL OFFICES.**

Harry's father and clerk at counter- Aunt Amanda telling father about Harry's reckless driving- Harry and Ethel enter from street- Aunt Amanda scolds- the young folks defend themselves- Aunt Amanda declares she will leave the hotel if Harry persists in attentions to her niece- she orders Ethel into elevator- follows her- Harry's father begins to scold him.

**Scene 20- KITCHEN.**

(Short scene) Servants handling pots and pans in listless fashion- Pete on with a rush- just putting on his white cap and apron- waves his arms commandingly- seizes his big spoon- servants galvanized into instant action- when all get busy- Pete's mind reverts to Aunt Amanda- he heaves a ponderous Italian sigh- but back to business immediately.

Leader- NEXT AFTERNOON- AUNT AMANDA SENDS ETHEL TO DO SOME SHOPPING.

**Scene 21- SITTING ROOM.**

Ethel dressed for street- Aunt at writing table- just finished shopping list- hands it to Ethel- but aren't you coming, Auntie?- Aunt pleads headache- says she's going to lie down- Ethel says she'd better stay and take care of her, but Aunt reassures her and says shopping is important- Ethel kisses Aunt and exits- Aunt Amanda immediately prepares to go out and meet Pete- acts kit-tenish when she thinks of the handsome gentleman.

**Scene 22- KITCHEN.**

(Flash) The dull hour again- Pete ready for his walk and his engagement with Aunt Amanda- he gives a few orders to a servant- pulls himself together and exits jauntily.

**Scene 23- PARK SCENE 3 (Same as 16-17).**

Aunt Amanda on- looks about expectantly- smiles coyly as she sees Pete coming- Pete on with flourish- they sit on bench- pleasant conversation.

Leader- "I AM HERE ON A SECRET MISSION- PROMISE TO KEEP MY NAME A SECRET."

**Scene 24- Same as 23 (PARK SCENE 3)**

Aunt Amanda asks Pete for his card- Pete contemplates- finally pulls out card case and with a flourish presents his card- she looks at it.

Insert- Card-

PETRO LANGORI  
COUNT OF MONTIVIDIO

Aunt Amanda astonished- "A Count!"- Pete proudly admits that he is no less- Aunt Amanda very much impressed- Pete assumes air of secrecy- she promises to keep the secret- but has he really a castle?- Pete with weeping gestures tells of his immense estate in sunny Italy- she listens and drinks in his words worshipfully- he takes her hand and motions that when he returns to his \$5,000,000 villa he'd like to take her with him as his wife- Aunt Amanda is overwhelmed with the proposition- Peitro draws her head to his manly shoulder- she sighs contentedly, blissfully- so does Peitro.

Leader- HE BUYS A RING.

Scene 25- EXTERIOR JEWELRY STORE (Camera close up).

Pete enters from store- ring box in his hand- stops and takes out ring- looks at it lovingly- sighs soulfully- suddenly remembers it's near dinner time- looks at watch- walks off hurriedly.

Scene 26- KITCHEN.

(Flash) Servants listless- Pete in street clothes comes in with a rush- shouts orders- waves cane- taking off overcoat as he does so- everybody jumps.

Scene 27- SITTING ROOM.

(Flash) Ethel dressed for dinner, talking to Harry over phone- looks towards bedroom nervously- afraid Aunt Amanda will hear.

Scene 28- HOTEL OFFICE (Camera close up).

(Flash) Harry talking mushy and phoning kisses to Ethel.

Scene 29- (Back to 27) SITTING ROOM.

(Short scene) Ethel sending kisses to Harry over phone- Aunt Amanda on from bedroom- hears Ethel at phone kissing Harry- speaks sharply- Ethel hastily hangs up- Aunt scolds- tells her to come down to dinner- both exit.

Scene 30- KITCHEN (Camera close up).

Peitro has ring and case in his hand- he is folding note written on small piece of paper- smiles tenderly- puts ring in case- stuffs note in it and closes case (cooks and waiters running across background).

Scene 31- DINING ROOM.

(Flash) Ethel and Aunt at their table- ordering dessert.

Scene 32- KITCHEN.

Pete holding ring box in hand- smiling- servants bustling about- waiter in with a rush, carrying tray full of dishes- collides with another servant- tray of dishes crashes to floor- Pete turns, throwing up his hands- the

ring box flies from his hand into a pot or pan on range (not important where it drops so long as it is in the direction of the range)- Pete holds up empty hands in consternation- looks on floor- everywhere.

Cut in- THE RING IS LOST.

But this is no time to look for anything, not even diamond rings- dinners must be served- he orders all back to work, but continues search himself.

Scene 33- DINING ROOM.

Ethel and Aunt almost finished dinner- waiter serving dessert (some kind of pudding)- Ethel's spoon strikes something strange- she digs it out of the pudding- "Why what's this?"- she wipes off the object with her napkin- Aunt Amanda curious, too.

Insert- Large picture, Ethel's hands open soiled ring box, takes out ring and small crumpled note.

(Continue scene) Ethel and Aunt's heads bend curiously over ring- Ethel reads note- hands it to Aunt.

Insert- NOTE- On crumpled piece of paper.

FROM  
THE COUNT OF MONTIVIDIO  
TO  
HIS DIVINE ONE.

(Continue scene) Ethel, with ring and case in hand, decides to report the curious occurrence at the office- rises and exits- Aunt Amanda reading note for the second time- wonder in her eyes- tries to recall Ethel, but too late- rubs her eyes and reads again.

Scene 34- HOTEL OFFICE.

Harry and his father at the counter- some guests just leaving keys- exit- Ethel on with ring- explains- Harry and father astonished- then angry to think such a thing could happen in their kitchen- father tells Harry to go down into the kitchen and find out about it- Harry goes toward kitchen with ring- Aunt Amanda enters from dining room- Ethel tells her to show note that came in ring box, but Aunt Amanda becomes confused- holds note tight and refuses to give it up- Ethel and Harry's father wonder.

Scene 35- KITCHEN.

Pete still looking for the ring- Harry enters with ring in his hand- speaks- everybody stops work and looks at Harry- he holds ring and box in air- "Where did this come from?"- Pete with an exclamation grabs the ring- then realizes he has betrayed himself- Harry goes at him

angrily- "What do you mean by trying to destroy our trade?" etc.- Pete apologetic, but Harry upbraids him until Pete feels insulted- retorts hotly- goes for Harry, waving spoon in his face- Harry retreats- Pete follows- both continue scolding until off scene- the servants watch open-mouthed.

**Scene 36- HOTEL OFFICE.**

Ethel and Harry's father questioning Aunt Amanda about note which she refuses to show- she is confused- they hear Pete and Harry approaching- Harry backs on- Pete follows on, talking loudly and gesticulating- father rushes between them- tries to restore order- Harry tells Pete dropped ring in pudding- Pete tells Harry butted into his kitchen- Aunt Amanda has been watching Pete with bulging eyes- she now stands in front of him and looks into his face- both are petrified- Pete is just forcing a sheepish smile when Aunt Amanda keels over in a dead faint- bellboys, guests, etc., have been attracted by the excitement- Harry's father tells Pete he's fired- Pete is now all in- father leads him unresisting back towards kitchen- guests and attendants carry Aunt Amanda to elevator- Ethel starts after them, but Harry pulls her back- elevator goes up- some people up-stairs talking it over.

Leader- "NOW'S OUR CHANCE- LET'S ELOPE DURING THE EXCITEMENT!"

**Scene 37- Same as 36 (HOTEL OFFICE).**

Guests dispersing- Harry says above Leader to Ethel- Ethel afraid- she must stay with her Aunt- but Harry asks "Don't you love me?"- after some hesitation she consents Harry gets his overcoat from behind (or under) counter- takes his father's coat and wraps Ethel in it- they run out.

**Scene 38- EXTERIOR FRONT OF HOTEL (NIGHT).**

(Flash) Couple of taxis standing- Harry helping Ethel into his auto- speed off.

Leader NEXT DAY.

**Scene 39- SITTING ROOM.**

Aunt Amanda rocking her body to and fro- moaning disconsolately- has Count of Montividio's crumpled note- oh, to think that he has betrayed her- the impostor- and where was Ethel?- everyone has gone back on her- oh! oh, oh.

**Scene 40- EXTERIOR FRONT OF HOTEL.**

Harry and Ethel dash up in auto (Ethel still wearing man's overcoat)- they are very happy- about to go into hotel when Ethel draws back- what will her Aunt and his

father say?- Harry is scared for a moment, but plucks up courage and leads Ethel through the door.

**Scene 41- HOTEL OFFICE.**

Father wondering where the devil his overcoat is and where Harry and Ethel are, etc.- Harry and Ethel on from street- very timid and doubtful- father starts and surveys them sternly- "Well, sir! give an account of yourself!"- Ethel hangs head- Harry says, drawing Ethel to him,

Cut in- "WE'RE MARRIED."

Father stern- doubtful- then he melts- wishes them joy, etc.- the next thing is Aunt Amanda- they ask the father to come up to see Aunt Amanda with them- but oh, no, not for his- they can have that pleasure all alone- well, it has to be done- they enter the elevator and it goes up- Pete enters, dressed in his very best- he is very proud- the father is surprised to see him- gets over the surprise and orders Pete out- he's a discharged chef- but Pete, with proud gesture, produces a letter, which he hands father- father reads with increasing surprise- it has a peculiar effect on him- he looks up at Pete with a new expression- Pete says he wants to go upstairs and see Aunt Amanda- father hesitates just a moment- then conducts Pete to elevator- both go up in elevator.

**Scene 42- SITTING ROOM.**

Harry and Ethel are pleading with Aunt Amanda to stop crying and forgive them- she is inconsolable for some reason- they don't understand- Harry hears a knock on the door- opens it- Pete and father enter- surprise- Pete touches Aunt Amanda on the shoulder and speaks- she starts up- then back- he holds his arms for her- she begins to upbraid him- he produces the same letter that he showed to father- hands it to Aunt- she reads, and while she reads Pete produces documents with large seals- hands them around.

Insert- LETTER.

ITALIAN CONSULATE,  
Philadelphia.

This is to certify that the bearer, Peitro Langori, is the real COUNT OF MONTIVIDIO. Owing to lack of funds, he has been working as chef; but he will soon fall heir to an estate worth over \$1,000,000.

(Signed)

ANTONIO CARDUCCI,  
Italian Consul.

(Continue scene) Aunt Amanda takes some time to realize that things have broken just right- but she is soon in the arms of the royal chef- she forgives everybody.

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